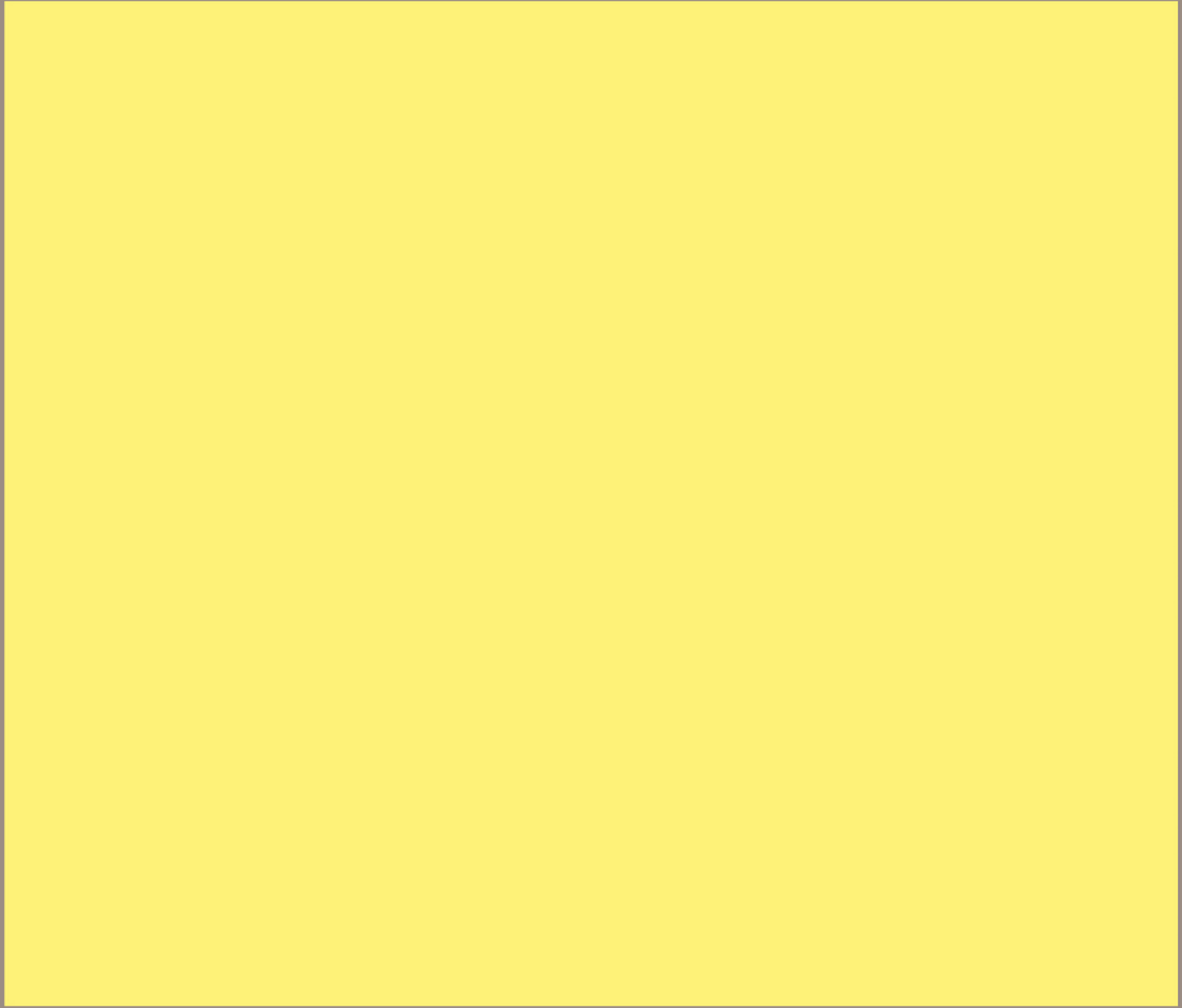


Digital Tarkovsky



Metahaven

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PART I

CINEMA OF THE INTERFACE

“If it were possible to demonstrate that lived reality is always a construct of the imagination and thus perceived only on condition of being fictional, irreducibly haunted by phantasms, then we would finally be forced to conclude that perception is subordinated to — is in a transductive relationship with — the imagination; that is, there would be no perception outside imagination, and vice versa, perception then being the imagination’s projection screen. The relationship between the two would be constituted of previously non-existent terms, and this in turn would mean that life is *always* cinema [...]”

— Bernard Stiegler

The chances are that you are reading these words on a mobile device. There is a good chance that you are spending a lot of time on that device every day. If that is the case, you are not alone. It is reported that in the US alone, the average adult spends two hours and 51 minutes on their smartphone every day. That is eight minutes longer than Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*. But it is a good hour and ten minutes shorter than the average time that a French worker once spent watching TV. In China in 2018, the average daily time spent on a mobile device has begun to exceed time spent watching television, increasing to two hours and 39 minutes per day — four minutes shorter than *Stalker*. [1]

For all the complaints that we could make against the average digital device for the time that it is stealing from us, we should perhaps instead investigate the kind of experience that we have whilst staring at — and interacting with — these tiny screens and the digital platforms inside and behind them. Since the experience we intend to describe contains the elements of image, sound, motion, interaction, and duration, we are considering it a *cinematic* experience.

Media theorist Charles Soukup contends that “the temporal and spatial dimensions of everyday life are complexly interconnected with digital screens. Time and space are fragmented and displaced as individuals are decreasingly ‘grounded’ or tethered to a kind of physical shared reality.” [2] We are engaging with digital devices and screens in a way that approaches, but has not yet reached, the stage of full immersion. In other words, the proto-cinematic narrative form that unites all of these screen experiences is not yet seamless and complete; a digital patchwork that blends in and out of reality and, at the time of writing, ends up totaling every day at the length of a slow Russian movie. This fragmented temporal experience inserts itself as a new kind of cinematic *Gesamtkunstwerk* for which we are yet to find the proper term. The objective of our essay is to probe this undeclared cinematic timespan.

We do so under the rubric “Digital Tarkovsky” because we believe that the work and world of the famed Russian filmmaker provides a fresh perspective, when re-interpreted in the context of the digital fragmentation that surrounds us.

As we will see, Tarkovsky's artistic method was significantly messier than is recognised in the common understanding of his work as Cinema with a capital 'C.' Thus, our essay will look at the way in which Cinema with a capital letter has consolidated its ideas about time and duration, which are closely tied to the human experience of the moving Now.

One of the most central qualities of Tarkovsky's films is how they make us feel the flow of time — even if such a flow is more of a human experience than an accurate scientific observation. Put differently, Tarkovsky forces us to experience the fact that things *take time*.

By contrast, our screens have become associated with ever-shortening attention spans and altered human cognitive functioning. [3] They change the way we spend our time in public, so “daydreaming, thinking, speculating, observing, and people-watching are diminishing arts.” [4] It's not uncommon to hear, in reaction to all this, the pledge to “swap Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram for facing real life head on.” [5]

But perhaps waiting, daydreaming, thinking, speculating, and observing have not vanished from daily life, and aren't diminishing arts as much as they are arts in redefinition. We are daydreaming, speculating, and waiting differently. Messages, push notifications, and social media prompts become a new measure of our time. Our addiction to the mobile device's platform services then enmeshes us in time intervals that run between our cravings for updates, shorter or longer latency periods when no updates happen, the moments of actual updates, and the velocities of all other events in our lives and environments. Here, also, things take time.

CUT TO

You remember the future as it once was: Internet Time. Swatch Internet Time. One global planet, so, one timeless time — said one famous guy. It was a clock that would be ticking in Switzerland.

It was before you left him or her. You left him or her on that day. You weren't even born yet. You lived in the Now. You remember the dizzying feeling of free fall. It's a long time ago now and nobody cares.

CUT TO

You knew what you would say if this were to be a lecture. You'd just straightaway point at the fact that everyone's real time is so much less fast than the platform's time. In your life, less happens — and the things in the feed don't really happen until they push themselves to the front, making your life seem more boring in comparison.

Internet Time, as conceived by Swiss watchmaker Swatch, was a single, global clock ticking for all of mankind, obliterating time zones. It has aptly been called “time’s version of Esperanto.” [6] Platforms have surpassed the basic analogy between globalisation and the web.

Internet platforms are technologies that function as a base upon which other applications, processes, or technologies are being developed. They are not websites, but infrastructures; apparatuses that demand constant user engagement.

CUT TO

HIMMEL ÜBER BERLIN. *The bar scene. They've met.*

The arrival of internet platforms implies the segmentation of global time into specific temporalities that each construct their own version of a moving Now. Indeed, in the context of platforms, “*the making of real-time* [...] does not unfold as a flat, eternal now or as a global, high-paced stream, but brings to our attention the particular web-specific entities, activities, and actors determining the temporality of the specific space,” wrote Esther Weltevrede, Anne Helmond, and Carolin Gerlitz in a 2014 study. They assert that this happens “at different speeds in relation to different devices.” [7] The researchers introduce the concept of pace, to indicate “relative speed of progress or change.” Thus, the rhythms at which different platforms and devices provide updates create specific temporalities. As a result, because of the many different platforms and markers that each manufacturer gives their own moving Nows, we see “a more complex simultaneity and folding of temporalities” occur. [8] Pacing “strategically organise[s] the speed at which movement and change occurs, bringing attention to the collaborative fabrication of speed and time.” [9]

The key point remains that “real-time” is a constructed, designed configuration of temporality that occurs in a complex simultaneity with other, concurrent pacing rhythms.

Since we set out to look at mobile devices and their temporality as an undeclared form of cinema, the notion of pacing presents some important starting points for thinking about platform temporality. Platforms direct narrative arches and cliffhangers, shaping themselves around a user’s needs and attention. All of this is crucially dependent on the user reciprocating. The platform experience becomes increasingly lengthier, while more user data feeds back into the platform. Leif Weatherby contends that “as we live more of our lives on platforms such as Facebook, even the line between mind and matter is up for grabs. Think about Elon Musk’s proposal to jack your brain into the social network directly, surpassing the necessity for typing. Mark Zuckerberg is a fan of this proposal, since whatever gets platformed — in this case, your mind — also becomes data owned by the platform-owners.” [\[10\]](#)

So, while the pacing of updates and prompts on various platforms and devices may be interpreted as an undeclared form of cinematic editing, the fact that we live more and more, but still not all of our lives on Facebook means that there remains a rarely accounted for *difference* or gap between life and platform. For example, Reed Hastings, the CEO of the Netflix movie streaming service, has determined that the platform’s biggest competitor is not another digital service, but sleep. “We’re competing with sleep, on the margin. And so, it’s a very large pool of time,” Hastings said. [\[11\]](#)

Sleep comes from the same world as Tarkovsky’s slow-moving *Now*. Duration outside platforms, but measured with their pacing regimes kept in mind, doesn’t accentuate how we have accelerated, but on the contrary, *how slow we still are*. Bodies move slower than platform updates would like them to think they could. So does a traffic jam, so does sleep, so does waiting for a message or update that one hopes to receive, but never actually gets. So are aspiring, hoping, wishing, praying. The thickness of reality increases when measured against the relentless pacing regimes of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Our impression of the viscosity of a *Now*, when measured against the undeclared cinematic regime of

platform-based pacing, increases, and brings us back to Tarkovsky, a progenitor of slow cinema.

Tarkovsky contends that the “all-powerful factor of the film image is *rhythm*, expressing the course of time within the frame. [...] One cannot conceive of a cinematic work with no sense of time passing through the shot, but one can easily imagine a film with no actors, music, décor or even editing.” [12] What then characterises the course of time for him? Why is it that, by both Soviet-era and contemporary standards, going at a slower pace and not another, faster one? Tarkovsky asserts that “although the assembly of the shots is responsible for the structure of a film, it does not, as is generally assumed, create its rhythm.” Rhythm is determined by the “pressure of time” that runs through the edited pieces, and not by the length of the cuts. To join up different parts, their time pressure has to match. “One cannot, for instance, put actual time together with conceptual time, any more than one can join water pipes of different diameters.” Tarkovsky appears to treat this view of time not as a subjective artistic position or even opinion, but as a fact. He insists that in film, time can flow with “intensity or ‘sloppiness’,” [13] making itself felt in a shot as, ultimately, a “pointer to something stretching out beyond the frame and to infinity; a pointer to life.” [14]

In 1964, Andy Warhol released the film *Sleep*, depicting, with a “lyrical gaze,” [15] his lover John Giorno sleeping soundly for five hours and 21 minutes. [16] It is not entirely clear whether Tarkovsky referred to *Sleep* when he recalled a film of the “American underground” which “shows a man asleep; we then see him waking up, and, by its own wizardry, the cinema gives that moment an unexpected and stunning aesthetic impact.” [17]

Hence, for Tarkovsky, the flow of time is not an artificially slowed-down experience referring only to the film itself. It is a direct continuation of the temporal experience of the world outside of the frame. By naming this phenomenon the “sloppiness” of time, Tarkovsky admits to the dysfunctional feeling of a viscous slowness vis-a-vis the pushing forward by force of editing, in which the audience’s “perception is being coerced.” [18]

One reason why Tarkovsky becomes crucially relevant in the digital age is because the sloppiness of passing time hasn't disappeared from our lives, *especially when* they are near-immersed in digital screens. If the pace of everyday experience is dictated by digital updates, there is always a remainder of experiences that don't obey this rhythm.

CUT TO

Interior. Day. You are waiting for her or him in the cafe, that just opened. You are early. You are waiting to have the difficult conversation with her or him. The music "My Girl" by Otis Redding, echoing through the empty space, comes exactly at the wrong moment. Because it's so beautiful. Because it reminds you of what matters most: acceptance. Forgiveness. Because it reminds you of things as they are rather than how you would like them to be. So it reminds you of the person you should be. Worse even: the person you once were and should have remained. Retrieve your former self before it's too late. Nobody could ever live up to promises that were the sole creation of expectations by others. Nobody could ever live up to your expectations. Tears start rolling from your eyes. Instead of waiting for her or him at the bar, you leave, and send them a message: "Sorry, I'm a bit late."

CUT TO

"Disinformation is one of the biggest threats our democracy faces. Like our reporting on dark money, it is one of those stories behind all the other stories. So we want to build a team dedicated to tracking and exposing the forces behind disinformation as a new reporting priority before this fall's midterms. But to do it, we need to raise \$100,000 that we didn't plan on before June 30. I hope you'll read our plan and get involved — and join us with a tax-deductible donation today." [\[19\]](#)

TIME AFTER TIME

We experience time as something that flows. We tell ourselves that the past is the past, and the present the present, by looking at the state-changes in our surroundings. Drinking glasses fall off the table and break. Trees grow. They don't unfall, unbreak, or ungrow. We can prove to ourselves that the future is the future because we don't

know what is going to happen tomorrow, evidenced by the fact that it hasn't happened yet. Events appear to happen along an "arrow" pointed in a forward direction. The video playhead, the moving Now, travels to our righthand side. There is a "timeline." On it, the playhead travels "east."

This is called the "A-theory" of time, in which "the passage of time is not only a feature of our experience, but also characterises time itself, independently of any experience of it: time really flows, with a Now that constantly shifts the boundary between Past and Future." [20] The A-theory appears evident both from the perspective of the onlooker, as well as from the way we have institutionalised time in human societies.

But time's "flow" is also a metaphor. So are the timeline and the playhead. They are attempts to grapple with the properties of time. The words that we use to describe time by comparison and metaphor also show our limits at understanding it. Cinema tends to institutionalise this limited, linear idea, and place it in a black box — the movie theatre.

In physics, the distinction between past and future is doubtful.

We think of Albert Einstein after the death of his friend, Michele Besso. "Now he has departed this strange world a little ahead of me," Einstein wrote in a letter to Besso's family. "That signifies nothing. For us believing physicists, the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion." [21]

In this light, Einstein could have written the letter to Besso himself instead of to his family. But he didn't, and it is easy to see why. For Besso's family, their loved one was gone. To physics, this may have meant little. but to human existence, it meant a world of difference. Time had an arrow: Besso's body would irreversibly disintegrate. He would not come back.

In *A Brief History of Time*, Stephen Hawking remarks: "Imagine a cup of water falling off a table and breaking into pieces on the floor. If you take a film of this, you can easily tell whether it is being run forward or backward. If you run it backward you will see the pieces suddenly gather themselves together off the floor and jump back to form a whole cup on the table. You can tell that the film is being run

backward because this kind of behaviour is never observed in ordinary life.” [22]

Hawking is right to note that *film* can do this, technically. So why then does *cinema* reject it, artistically? Cinema does not normally resolve the problem of the broken cup by running the footage backwards. Instead, its drama is the unfolding of entropy itself. As in life, irreversibility is the driving force of the narrative. Cinema finds one of its sources of drama in entropy, and a certain amount of realism or life-likeness plays a role here too. We recognize entropy and can thus believe in films. Hawking says that reversing the event — in which the broken cup flies back up and re-integrates itself on the table — does not correspond to observations of ordinary life. [23]

Tarkovsky makes a potentially crucial distinction between “recreating reality” [24] — which was something he was not interested in — and the “flow of time” that extends beyond the frame. Hawking’s remark pertains to the behaviour of the cup of water as observed in daily life, not to the flow of time, or duration of an event, as observed in daily life. Since duration has no direction, it could potentially be uncoupled from cause-and-effect relationships like the falling resulting in the breaking. In other words, it should theoretically be possible to create an unrealistic, and yet life-like cinematic experience of time flowing in a direction other than forward.

An artificial intelligence (AI) tasked with restoring narratives from entropy to order would have no qualms about dealing with it rather dispassionately.

An AI that had sensed its way to understanding completely different theories of time than those common in most films could be asked to make cinema with it. It would be unbound by a need to be entertained, unfettered by the limitations of the human attention span, and unconvinced by the dogma of a singular, moving Now.

The “B-theory” of time was developed in the context of relativity theory, which recognises temporal relations — “earlier than” and “later than” — but does not identify a moving Now. There is no playhead.

CUT TO

*Cinema. Interior. Dark. There is no film playing on the screen.
The film that isn’t playing is HIMMEL ÜBER BERLIN.*

It gets a lot more complicated than that. In the spacetime of special relativity named after the mathematician Hermann Minkowski (1864-1909), no time function is defined. The four-dimensional structure of Minkowski spacetime holds all events in the history of the universe. Ungraspable. Instead of a time function, there are only relative distances between pairs of points in spacetime, between which various processes can operate. The points are connected by curves. The number that measures the distance between the points, summarises the physicist Dennis Dieks, “has the physical interpretation of the lapse of time that would be measured by a clock whose motion between the two point events is represented by the [curve] in question.” [25] Duration arises out of the measurement of the processes between pairs of points, but this duration has multiple values.

An AI with an intuition for B-time, equipped with unlimited patience and a substantially broadened and prolonged cinematic vision, could possibly register modes of temporality, perspective, and photography that aren't currently within reach for most human beings.

Computation, as a *filmmaker*, already sees, senses, measures, and records its own unique kind of moving images, and thus, is building undeclared cinematic regimes, waiting to be discovered. Something as apparently straightforward as a camera that films earth from a satellite in space, for example, is very good at holding the same shot for a very long time.

Only after its initial recording is the fabric of that satellite image woven and stitched together, wrapping itself around a virtual sphere, in order to conform to the visual idea of a turning globe that represents something we call Earth in the Now. [26]

As computation gets curious, its unrelenting, probing wit will seek answers to its questions about cinema. It may intuit B-time's nascent cinematic potential on various levels: script, storyboard, and actual film. Going further, it would re-map its findings from B-time back onto an A-time experience in some way, so that film emerges that is watchable for humans. Such a film, whilst hard to predict in terms of its visual qualities, would be the artistic equivalent of a text or diagram that is explaining B-time inside A-time. But instead of

helping us understand B-time, such a film would make us *feel* it. Continuing this thought experiment, could Tarkovsky's idea of time that is flowing from within to outside a frame, rather than being pushed ahead, be developed further? Is there something like a *Tarkovskyan spacetime*?

In his 1889 doctoral thesis, the philosopher Henri Bergson asked the following question:

Does the multiplicity of our conscious states bear the slightest resemblance to the multiplicity of the units of a number? Has true duration anything to do with space? Certainly, our analysis of the idea of number could not but make us doubt this analogy, to say no more. For if time, as the reflective consciousness represents it, is a medium in which our conscious states form a discrete series so as to admit of being counted, and if on the other hand our conception of number ends in spreading out in space everything which can be directly counted, it is to be presumed that time, understood in the sense of a medium in which we make distinctions and count, is nothing but space. [27]

Philosophical, physical, and cinematic speculations about time face a practical confrontation with the moving Now. It forces itself to the foreground every time we are trying to escape time. Our thought is interrupted because someone is ringing the doorbell. Or a message arrives on our phone. How does this obsession with the recurrent Now reflect on film and its future? [28]

A SPECIAL NOW

In his book series *Technics and Time*, Bernard Stiegler sets out a number of ideas on cinematic time and experience, influenced by the philosophers Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, and Edmund Husserl. For Stiegler, cinema creates a sort of temporary pocket inside a larger timescale, in which cinematic consciousness becomes active. While watching a film, "the time of our consciousness will be totally passive within the thrall of those 'moving' images that are linked together by noises, sounds, words, voices. [M]inutes of our life will have passed by outside our 'real' life, but within a life or the lives of people and events, [29] real or fictive, to which we will have conjoined our time, adopting their events as though they were happening to us as they happened to them." [30]

CUT TO

Your phone screen is broken several times over. But it doesn't matter. You look up. You are walking along the deserted train tracks, in between the high grass. No matter how hard you try, you can't shake the feeling that you've been here before. If not personally, then certainly in some shared memory. You remember a discussion that took place in school. Someone said that the world has run out of places, that it has run out of unknown. Someone else did not agree. Reality is always a mystery, everyday, he said. But the other one continued: having run out of unknown on this planet, you jump off the edge of a cliff with a GoPro Hero camera attached to your wrist. On the cliff-edge of this utterly mapped world, this is what you do. You think it is about the only thing you can still do. This is like jumping off a flat planet, the medieval planet. You've run out of ideas on how to conceive of its spheric shape as an astral body, an alien planet, and of yourself, and others, as utter strangers, as aliens, so in a way there's nothing there for you anymore, there's just this flat world. You jump. Off the edge, into the undefined. But the belt catches you.

What characterises this cinematic consciousness, this being in and of cinema? Simply, “the coincidence between the film’s flow and that of the film spectator’s consciousness.” Deleuze surmised that there are two components here, on the one hand “instantaneous sections which are called images,” and on the other, “a movement or a time which is impersonal, uniform, abstract, invisible, or imperceptible, which is ‘in’ the apparatus, and ‘with’ which the images are made to pass consecutively.” [31] This already unravels time’s experience into a distinction between the immediacy of the Now, of the instant, of the playhead, and the larger and even imperceptible space or dimension of time which cannot be grasped in the Now.

Stiegler proposes that “a glass — say, a plain glass of water — is clearly a temporal object in the sense that it exists in time and is thus subject to universal physical laws and to entropy: it is temporal because it is not eternal.” Indeed, the plain glass of water is an object that insists in time, but is not *of* time. Stiegler follows Edmund Husserl’s proposition, first made in 1905, that “a *melody* is

a temporal object in the sense that it is constituted only in its duration.” Indeed, “a properly temporal object is not simply ‘in time’: it is formed temporally.” [32]

Husserl situates memory and anticipation as objects in time. In retention, perceptual acts are retained in consciousness. In protention, an anticipation of the moment is formed, an expectation of the future. [33] “Primary retention is what the *now* of an unfolding temporal object retains in itself from all of its previous *nows*. Even though they have passed, these preceding *nows* are maintained within the temporal object’s current *now*, and, in this respect, they remain present even while perpetually becoming past; they remain present as having happened and in being sustained as having happened in the current *now* — they are maintained as both present and absent in the currently occurring *now* and insofar as the temporal object is not completely unfolded, completely past but still passing (i.e. temporal). When I hear a melody, as a temporal object it presents itself to me as it unfolds. In the course of this process each note that is presented now retains in itself the preceding note, which itself retains the preceding one, etc. The current note contains within it all the preceding notes. [...]” [34]

Prior events accumulate into an experiential “current note,” a *Now* that functions not just as a momentary state of being but as a hyper-dense neutron star comprised of many previous *Nows*. The consecutive passing of each image thus becomes compressed into each future *Now*. Stiegler continues to connect retention to imagination. Indeed, “it is enough to have heard a melody twice through in order to be able to state that in these two hearings consciousness had not been listening with the same ears: that something happened between the first and second hearing.” The way perception changes between phases of retention is an editing process of sorts, interlinking what happened with what will, or may happen. Stiegler calls this “the intervention of the imagination at the heart of perception,” because otherwise, how would it be possible that “one consciousness can listen to the same temporal object twice?” [35]

If we would remember the events of yesterday to their full extent, and there would be no loss of memory, every yesterday would be

fully represented in today's moving Now, and it would suppress that Now. In which case, according to Stiegler, "time has not passed. Nothing has happened nor can happen to me, neither present (in which something new always presents itself to me, including boredom with the absence of the new) nor past: the present no longer passing, no longer happening; no passage of time is possible. *Time has ceased to exist.*" [36]

Stiegler views cinematic duration as a temporal pocket inside the larger structure of time. A distant observer, watching from afar, might therefore have a very different experience than someone who is directly involved with the temporal object. Bradford Skow asserts that a philosopher who holds him- or herself "outside of the world of the play" may ask different questions — and get different answers — than someone immersed in it. Indeed, Skow continues dispassionately, "[i]f the passage of time requires that time move or flow in anything like the way rivers do, then, I think, there is no such thing as the passage of time. If the passage of time requires that we move through time in anything like the way that trains move through space, then there is no such thing as the passage of time." [37]

The shady goings-on in time's "B-theory" are typically of no concern to the world of film. Instead of just taking duration to be the measure of any curve between a pair of points in spacetime, cinema takes it to be the time that has passed between a film's beginning and end and uses this to classify films according to their length. According to the British Film Institute, a feature film should be 40 minutes in length or more. The Screen Actors Guild puts its shortest acceptable feature at 80 minutes.

If a film is, by cinematic convention, defined as having a beginning and an end, what would a film be in special relativity? Beginning and end form a pair of points, but the film has no definite length, or more precisely, no definite answer can be given to the question of the time difference between beginning and end. The same film has as many possible durations as there are curves that connect the points that were arbitrarily named beginning and end.

Films may have no beginnings, no ends, or no beginnings *and* ends, only a measurement between points. Only then when an A-theory Now makes a timeline, does it make the viewer of that

timeline experience a kind of simultaneity with something quite more indefinite.

Beginning and end now do not signify the duration of the film, but the two moments when a viewer starts and stops watching.

Going to the cinema is already a bit like going back in time, to a velvet-upholstered chair equipped with a cup holder, fixing one's spatial position in front of a giant moving image as if it were the only thing in the world that matters. In comparison with their surrounding visual culture, cinemas have become spaces of enforced watching. Filmgoers are told to switch off their phones before a film begins. And this is understandable: the phone competes with, and distracts from, the big film playing out on the big screen. One neighbouring WhatsApp conversation can ruin the experience for a whole row of avid watchers. That being true, there is still something odd about the prompt to not use your phone. There are pragmatic reasons for it, of course, but at the same time there seems to be deeper rivalry at work. In spite of film having already ostentatiously won the competition for biggest screen, it still deems it necessary to set rules to avoid distraction from other durational devices; film's claims on space have to be aggressively defended *because it has lost its monopoly on time*. More precisely, cinema has lost its monopoly over the dominating inner-time that the screen acts as a conduit for.

Who does not know the experience of leaving the cinema at night with the surreal feeling that the film you have just seen continues in reality? The playhead moves about on its own. The streets at night feel like you are still in the cinema. Usually, this feeling lasts no longer than a few minutes, but it is perhaps one of the strongest impacts that a film can have on our perception of ourselves in the outside world. It is not just that this reality is augmented by the afterimage, it is as if the film's world continues despite the timeline being over. If we accept that the ultimate experience of an artwork is in the eye of the beholder, then this strange afterimage must be, in some way, accepted as part of the artwork, part of the film — with a still-moving playhead running into the hors-temps or off-time. After some minutes, reality prevails; the film's artificial Now is slowly fading into the backdrop. The playhead evaporates and disappears.

This is something that cinema can do but the interface cannot, at least outside of VR. The duration of the cinematic experience, and its life-likeness to the world outside, are feeding into a continuum.

THE LONGER TAKE

In post-war France, the historian Fernand Braudel introduced an equivalent of the cinematic long take: the *longue durée*. It was nothing short of a paradigm shift in what it meant to write history, and how this was supposed to happen. Braudel viewed history as a dialectic between slow, almost imperceptible change, and the present as it would be experienced at any given moment. Braudel criticized how economists reduced historical time to cycles of growth and decline. Their focus on short time (as opposed to *longue durée*) had been *au bénéfice*

de l'histoire économique et sociale, au détriment de l'histoire politique — it had benefitted economic and social history but impoverished political history. [38] Braudel wrote, “history, or rather the *dialectic of duration*, from our repeated observations, is important in the coming debate among all the human sciences. For nothing is more important, nothing comes closer to the crux of social reality than this living, intimate, infinitely repeated opposition between the instant of time and that time which flows only slowly.” [39]

The idea that our experience of the everyday Now stands in a dialectic relationship with the longer historical trajectory shifts the cinematic frame up to a scale where the “heat of the moment” comes to form a dialectic opposition to that scale itself. Braudel’s long-term historical pattern recognition disjoins the moving playhead from the in- and out-points of the take. Unsurprisingly, a field for which Braudel’s work holds a special significance is that of climatology. The massive, irreversible, planetary-scale climate change that is associated with the feedback loops which human industrial and economic activity has triggered onto the planet can *politically* uniquely be assessed as a *longue durée*. It is not simply the tragedy of a natural inevitability, but an outcome of an accumulation of distinct developments that are usually described by distinct scientific and scholarly disciplines and thus, politically, become rather un-mappable. *Longue durée* is especially suited to assess fundamental shifts that can be understood as very long

takes. In a 1969 essay, Braudel writes that “climate must be, on all the evidence, the crucial factor in an ecology of man.” [40]

On November 7, 2012, Donald Trump tweeted: “It’s freezing and snowing in New York — we need global warming!” [41] The future president of the United States demonstrated, in grotesquely inflated form, what beguiles humans with their own innate sense of hereness and nowness, elevating it to the norm for the universe and everything and everyone else. Why should cinema keep catering to this erratic human trait, the fallacy of the Now?

TOWARDS DIGITAL TARKOVSKY

Having laid out a number of ideas of time and duration, let us now return to our initial question; the question of how to interpret and appreciate the time we spend on our devices and screens as a form of cinema. And perhaps ask another question — *why* are we doing this? Why must this everyday smartphone ritual be compared to cinema?

There is a technological threshold between the movie industry's idea of production and the badlands of iPhone cameras, full HD, and overheated laptops rending short, subprime bits of Cinema 4D. The lavish materialism of cinema and the enormous budgets to pull it off appear to establish an intimidating, massive certainty in opposition to the fleeting digital chaos. Experimental film exists, certainly. Films that were made without a story or script exist too. Abstract film exists. Films that toy around with all of film’s governing laws exist. It’s all true.

But the words “Congratulations on your wonderful art film!” — as we once received from a major film festival — still spell bad news for a filmmaker. Cinema is art, but art film is not cinema. Despite the advent of “post-cinema,” [42] so much of film appears to be firmly set on its story-based, linear approach, reinforced by a highly specialised industry model. From ample textbooks on how to write screenplays and drive narratives down to specialised magazines for directors-of-photography, communities of colourists, focus pullers, file managers, caterers, pools of makeup artists, film festivals where you can catch a glimpse of George Clooney, directors that build entire sets of otherworldly dune landscapes and decide to not use the footage. And there is hardware and optics of all forms and kinds,

cast-iron supercomputers, cameras with credit card slots to instantly order hardware-level sci-fi nostalgia filters. Most of all, there are the Rules. They who sneak into cinema's imposing cathedral without an invitation must drop all previous work and learn them: story, show, do not tell, characters with clear motives, create dialogue, movement, dynamic, never repeat, and never play any footage backwards. Eighty minutes minimum. And so on.

Why then bother cinema's temple with its surrounding digital camping grounds, with social media fluff, YouTube clips, disappearing Snapchat pictures, manic text messages, animated gifs, manipulated Wikipedia articles, Instagram stories, fake news websites, failing Skype calls, Pokemon Go, stickers, overlays... why bother cinema with *interface*?

CUT TO

Your film. Not only is cinema a sacred domain with limited access, it is intrinsically made more sacred by its occasional assumption of unabridged pomp. The Masters never doubt. Whereas most ordinary folk run clueless errands in spacetime, not knowing how long or where or when, great Directors direct their every shot with utmost certainty, like in THE DEER HUNTER as they go deer hunting. The shot is vintage autobiographical, ready for the Louis Vuitton ad on the back cover of Monocle magazine.

CUT TO

The essay. But you're on the phone.

CUT TO

The scene that you call "the rant" and which your editors have politely advised to cut. But you decide to keep it. There's a handsome, fancily dressed man with a typewriter. It's the director Christopher Nolan. THE Christopher Nolan. Of INSOMNIA, BATMAN, INTERSTELLAR, DUNKIRK. Many have said DUNKIRK was about Brexit. You hesitate. You cut the scene.

CUT TO

It's a confrontation between materialities. Your version of digital is all about being in transit and precarious. In your laptop, your deepest feelings, stored in flash memory, literally sit right next to

the graphics card that is struggling to encode your new short film. When you imagine yourself endowed with the means of production to, for once, do everything “properly,” every machine gets its single task and every day its single purpose. You do one thing at a time and you do it well.

Christopher Nolan “in preparation for each film [...] spends a week or two bashing out a little précis, on the same typewriter his father gave him when he was 21.” [43] The logical fallacy here is the idea that Nolan’s deployment of an analogue typewriter (over, presumably, a digital one) somehow leads to a better synopsis, namely a “précis.” Were the same text to be composed in the third-grade consumer-digital badlands where most others do their writing, on murky touchscreens, crammed in damp buses and crowded subway cars, it would not be the same, the sentence suggests.

Cinema is a material practice. It’s made up of bodies, technology, money, effort, sacrifice — and it is also a place of exclusion, where sharp boundaries are being drawn between those who are let in, and those who aren’t. These boundaries are produced by, translated into, and reinforced as access to the material means that are necessary to create and sustain cinema. The typewriter anecdote is all about that.

The digital badlands are, in many ways, what the cheap guitars and amplifiers of punk rock once were to big studio music production. Our reason, in this essay, for combining *interface* with *cinema* is that the means of display — our devices — have come to overlap with the means of production. The camera is also the screen. Hence, we surmise, they must have a time, some time, in common.

We are looking for a yet-undeclared cinema of the interface, and will set out on this journey referencing a filmmaker who detested computers even *before* they became omnipresent. His sense of time has a lot to tell us about our platform-paced lives, in which the true pace of change is still, as we have trouble admitting, well below the speed of fibre-optics.

CUT TO

The chamois sheet of hand-crafted parchment trembles in the half-broken typewriter that our Mother gave to us when we were,

respectively, one and nine years old, and which she salvaged from a dying shepherd during the Great Patriotic War.[\[44\]](#) It is winter, and so cold that we can hardly move our fingers.

QWERTY... if only this were a QWERTY keyboard. But we had already pretended to Monocle that we always write our précis in Cyrillic. Then we type, in slow pace, all caps: ТАРКÓВСКИЙ.

PART II

HORIZONTAL GRAVITY

*A poet's speech begins a great way off.
A poet is carried far away by speech*

*by way of planets, signs, and the ruts
of roundabout parables, between yes and no,
in his hands even sweeping gestures from
a bell-tower
become hook-like. For the way of comets*

*is the poet's way. And the blown-apart
links of causality are his links. Look up
after him without hope. The eclipses of
poets are not foretold in the calendar.*

— Marina Tsvetaeva, *The Poet*, 1923 [\[1\]](#)

What do we know about Tarkovsky when we know nothing about his films? Can we know them if we have not seen them?

CUT TO

Moscow, small lecture hall, day. A presenter goes through a Keynote with Tarkovsky memes in front of an audience of students, some of whom seem half asleep. One meme, featuring Bart Simpson, says: NOT SURE IF TARKOVSKY FILM FROZE, OR IF I NEED TO APPRECIATE THIS ARTISTIC SCENERY.

Another one has a photo of the actor Ryan Gosling, overlaid with the text HEY GIRL, COME TO MY TARKOVSKY SCREENING, IN THE FRESCO BARN.

In comparison with mainstream entertainment Tarkovsky's films indeed possess an element of creepiness, due in part to their sheer length and lack of obvious, goal-oriented kinetic action. And the Internet, or at least these memes, seems to have an inherent understanding of this. His films are the antithesis of what can be easily grasped and shared in the online world, and that is their meme. One does not need to have seen any of his films to know this. It is creepy when a guy invites you to join him for a very long, private screening of an incomprehensible film. It is confusing when a moving image becomes a still image, something that's associated with technological malfunction and things going wrong.

In the previous chapter, we discussed how duration in a digital age is a Tarkovskyan experience. However, our discussion of this subject does not yet give us any certainty about the degree to which digital images themselves are or can be Tarkovskyan; indeed, for now, it seems a little more like the opposite. His films embody a cinematic idea that digital culture has only *latently* realised for and in itself.

On YouTube, for example, viewers seem to have almost complete control over the experience. They are able to play and stop the video, to move the playhead to any point in its timeline, and to quit at any point and move on to something else. And while the platform provides suggestions for further watching based on its infamous algorithm, [2] overall it still seems as if the duration of the experience is of the viewers' own making. Voluntarily subjecting

oneself to an hours-long, arduously slow film seems very at odds with that sense of choice, until one realizes that the timescale *in which* we watch and unwatch is not entirely one of our own making and choice: the digital world seizes control of intentionality and dictates duration and content more often than not, just as Tarkovsky does. We are drawn into watching for no clear reason, switching back and forth between the digital screen and its surrounding reality, waiting for something to happen in the time lapses of updates. The viscosity of that timescale is arduous, and latently Tarkovskyan.

A broadband Internet connection today is more than 40,000 times faster than it was in the 1980s. [3] Moving image on the web has thus been bound to means of compression in order to make it transmittable at all. One can say that the online moving image was, originally, either low-quality or low-speed. It is, still now, intricately bound to image-compression formats such as mp4, and player codecs such as Adobe Flash and HTML5 video. But that is not the only reason for its Tarkovskyan potential. Tarkovsky wanted to communicate, in the words of Swedish cinematographer Sven Nykvist, “emotions, moods, atmosphere,” and “impart a soul to objects and nature.” [4] In doing so he relied on the intrinsic sci-fi-ness of the situation, with very little special effects or props. In this respect, the Tarkovskyan image shares some properties with user-generated self-production, in which semi-universally distributed hardware and software make everybody a potential filmmaker. [5]

As the memes made clear, there is something about his images that feels utterly resistant and alien to the online world of quick consumption. Although Nykvist rightly stresses that Tarkovsky’s scenes were full of movement, they present something of an abyss to the digital image. Something so mysterious and otherworldly that it can be felt as being intimately connected to the disembodied, abstract, and intense experience of the digital space.

However, a commonly held view is that Tarkovsky’s world has come under threat in modern times. For example, Geoff Dyer complains that “we move further and further away from Tarkovsky time towards *moron-time* in which nothing can last — and no one can concentrate on anything — for longer than about two seconds.” [6] Will Self, in a talk spearheaded by a still from *Solaris*,

decries the dramatic shortening of the average shot length in films over the course of the last century. For this reason, Self claims he no longer watches films, but only film stills. [7] Time, says Dyer, is no longer experienced as an art form but simply as a hindrance to enjoyment. The image, argues Self, has become so manipulable in a digital age that its production value exceeds our capacity to believe. Stills, then, have an infinite duration; they remain as long as we look at them and are temporal objects just as Stiegler's glass. They are objects in time, but not of time. These two factors, time (in relation to voluntary subjugation to its flow) and image (in relation to belief in what it shows) create the context for our discussion of Tarkovsky's films. We are looking for the fantastical in an everyday guise — and searching for our own capacities, in a digital sphere, to believe in an image (again).

MAKING WORLDS AND TIME CYCLES

The difference between Tarkovsky and most mainstream films is no accident. Tarkovsky's films were conceived outside the visual and narrative standardisation of cinematic time and image by the rules of commercial studios and television broadcasters. In Tarkovsky, there seems to be a kind of "horizontal gravity" at work on the timeline, a force pulling the flow slightly backwards. [8] The difficulty of this was recognised early on, as fierce debate surrounded the release of Tarkovsky's longest-ever film, *Andrei Rublyev* (1966). The young mathematician and Lenin Prize winner Yuri Manin is reported to have said the following during one debate, cited by the filmmaker with obvious endorsement:

Almost every speaker has asked why they have to be made to suffer all through the three hours of the film. I'll try to reply to that question. It is because the twentieth century has seen the rise of a kind of emotional inflation. When we read in a newspaper that two million people have been butchered in Indonesia, it makes as much impression on us as an account of our hockey team winning a match. The same degree of impression! We fail to notice the monstrous discrepancy between these two events. The channels of our perception have been smoothed out to the point where we are no longer aware. However, I don't want to preach about this. It may be that without it life would be

impossible. Only the point is that there are some artists who make us feel the true measure of things. It is a burden which they carry throughout their lives, and we must be thankful to them. [9]

Andrei Tarkovsky was born in 1932 in the village of Zavrazhe, Yuryevetsky District, Ivanovo Industrial Oblast (modern-day Kostroma region) in Soviet Russia. He died 54 years later in exile in Paris. Tarkovsky wrote and directed seven feature films during his life.

The crossroads between cinema and art that he worked at was embodied by the films themselves, but also by the methods by which they came into being. From first ideas, to shooting script, to realisation, there was a process of constant modification and reiteration. Tarkovsky said that a script had to “die in the film.” [10] Most directors and producers would agree that a film’s idea gets modified during its making, but not many would commit to a process like Tarkovsky’s, risking so much of what seemed to be certain on paper in the becoming of moving image. Elements of Tarkovsky’s method could be called makeshift, or even patchy. This wasn’t all Cinema with a capital C — in fact, proper interpretation of the work in the context of digital culture may even be hindered by its canonisation under this authoritative nomenclature.

Tarkovsky worked at a geographical crossroads between East and West and at a temporal crossroads between political epochs. His debut film, *Ivan’s Childhood*, was released in 1962, at the end of the period of ideological thaw that had followed Stalin’s death. His last film, *The Sacrifice*, was released in Sweden in 1986, six years before the official end of the Soviet Union. Tarkovsky died in exile in Paris. In 1990, he was posthumously awarded the Soviet Union’s highest distinction for the arts and sciences, the Lenin Prize.

Tarkovsky directed with Mosfilm, the Soviet Union’s most prominent, Moscow-based production studio. He made most of his films under the auspices of Goskino, the State Committee for Cinematography. All plans had to pass through a Script Board and an Artistic Council before being approved for production.

Dependency on an all-encompassing state apparatus is often regarded as the most severe barrier that Tarkovsky’s talent faced. What if he would instead have been able to produce his films free

from all the constraints that were imposed? For example, in 2014, in an online piece about *Stalker*, a commenter tried to empathise with the film's supposed material poverty. This user wrote: "From what I understand, Tarkovsky's films were made under censorship and with a very small amount of money, allowing for only one or two takes on each scene. To me the most emotional reading of the film, oddly enough, is as a kind of inherently insufficient sci-fi, where the characters seek an alternate, more fantastic world that simply is not penetrable, especially among their bleak surroundings." [11]

But this online comment about *Stalker* is full of mistaken assumptions. Whilst it is correct that Mosfilm's equipment was limited, the studio facilitated long and relaxed shooting schedules. Natasha Synessios notes that once a go-ahead had been given for a film, the system, in spite of its obstacles, allowed for a "freedom undreamed of in the Western film industry." [12] Moreover, the dearth of sci-fi props in *Stalker* is no accident. Tarkovsky believed that "a detailed 'examination' of the technological processes of the future transforms the emotional foundation of a film, as a work of art, into a lifeless schema with only pretensions to truth." [13]

Geoff Dyer observes that whilst Tarkovsky "often felt frustrated by the control exercised by the state over his and others' artistic freedom, in the West a subtler kind of censorship and tyranny — that of the market — would have made it extremely unlikely that he could ever have obtained permission (raised the funds) to make *Mirror or Stalker*." [14]

Most films were shot using a single camera. As a consequence, instead of visual ping-pong between the actors during dialogue, there are distinct shots of each actor. Alternatively, there is a shot that fits them into a single composition. The films retain a strong sense of internal unity, as they use their distinctively limited means to maximal effect; conceived images, self-contained visual worlds, are revealed in very long takes. Tarkovsky had been influenced by the Japanese filmmaker Kenji Mizoguchi [15] and his ways of using tracking shots and depth-of-field. [16] In 2007, Tarkovsky's son wrote that "my Father created artistic images, the power of which lies in their direct impact, in the way creator and viewer become spiritually as one. As he himself said, 'An image is not some idea as expressed

by the director, but an entire world reflected in a drop of water.” [17] This summarises how the limitation of the single camera helped to construct this visual world. It also speaks to the increasingly sacred vocabulary that avid Tarkovsky friends and family adopt to describe his work.

IVAN’S CHILDHOOD

Tarkovsky’s feature debut was *Ivan’s Childhood* (1962), based on a novel, *Ivan*, by Vladimir Bogomolov. The story follows a young scout for the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War. While attracted to the novel, Tarkovsky reportedly would only make the film if he would be allowed to apply a “solution” to the story. Asked what that solution was, Tarkovsky replied: “Ivan dreams [of] the life he has been robbed of — a normal childhood.” [18] For Tarkovsky, this meant a childhood in which Ivan enjoys wonder, play, and peace — a childhood in which existence itself is a sensual miracle.

Ivan’s Childhood critiqued war in an unconventional way: by revealing what it had suppressed and made impossible to happen. For Bogomolov, the film had to be a “life-like representation of spaces and people.” [19] But Tarkovsky disagreed, and had his way. Ivan’s lyrical and haunting dreams became the zenith of the film. They featured spider’s webs, dead trees, water wells, beaches, and mother, introduced in the very first scene. The enthusiasm of Ivan, his adventures outdoors, and his homecomings to mother are straightforward in their motive, yet complexly crafted. The result crushes the viewer with its lyricism. Like an exploding soap bubble, one hopes somehow to preserve the opening scene; hold onto a childhood that — lived or dreamed, granted or stolen — has resided within, or without, all of us.

CUT TO

INGUSHETIA, refugee camp, tent school, March 2000. The teacher asks the eight- to nine-year-old children to write compositions about their homeland, a patriotic practice common in the former Soviet Union. The results come in: “[T]welve flimsy scraps of paper. Condensed emotion. Undeniable proof and material expression of their love. It does not get any more truthful than this,” writes Anna Politkovskaya, fearlessly reporting on the bitter realities of the Second Chechen War. [20] And one of the

most remarkable writings was by Marina Magomedkhadjieva. We Googled Marina and found only one result: Politkovskaya's book.

MARINA MAGOMEDKHADJIEVA

My city Grozny always radiated beauty and goodness. But now all that is gone like a beautiful dream and only memories remain. The war is blind, it doesn't see the city, the school, or the children. All this is the work of the armadas from Russia, and therefore not only our eyes are weeping but also our tiny hearts. Now we have nowhere to go to school, to play and enjoy ourselves. Now we run back and forth and we don't know what to do. But if they asked us we would say: 'That's enough bloodshed. If you do not stop this senseless war, we shall never forgive you.' Soldiers! Think of your children, of your own childhood! [21]

Upon its release, Tarkovsky said that *Ivan's Childhood* should express his hatred of war. Childhood contrasts most with war, he said. The film "isn't built upon plot, but rests on the opposition between war and the feelings of the child." [22]

In conventional filmmaking, a protagonist's actions drive the narrative, and their character's virtues and faults become dear to us, tying us to the film. A recent textbook on script writing asserts that the key to constructing a protagonist is "duality." For example, "Elle in *Legally Blonde* is blonde, spoiled, into the elite social scene of Bel Air. She is also smart, determined, resourceful, and a great friend." [23]

Unsurprisingly, Tarkovsky approaches the idea of a protagonist in a very different way. In the case of *Ivan's Childhood*, the protagonist is the embodiment of a universality — a kind of avatar for childhood — whose conflicts and dialectics do not appear to exist outside of the distance between reality and his dreams. As Tarkovsky explains, the conflict is between war and the child. It is not within the child.

By suspending the driving force of screenplay duality, Tarkovsky enables us to immerse ourselves in the image in a different way than if we simply followed the character. He transforms the moving image frame into a painting, not only by composition but by the kind of attachment we are compelled to experience. And the Tarkovsky painting, in turn, does not need to be causally or chronologically tied

to its preceding and successive frames, and may be experienced quite independently from the film's linear structure.

Valeriya Baeva, in an article about differences in the treatment of religion by Tarkovsky and by Ingmar Bergman, stresses that the latter looks at humans in their process of being in and out of touch with God. She asserts that “[m]an has temptations, doubts, he is constantly searching for answers to his questions.” To expose the all-too-human condition of doubt, Bergman considers man “as if under a magnifying glass.” By contrast, writes Baeva, Tarkovsky “has a mystical sense of a supernatural power of [an] almighty God.” [24]

For example, it is raining indoors while there isn't a leaky roof — a fantastical event that is a frequent occurrence in his films. The house is part of the narrative structure, but the indoor rain is not. It is a separate occurrence that does not causally result from preceding events. It is the moment when narrative becomes metaphor, and film becomes painting. Tarkovsky affirms that “the image is indivisible and elusive, dependent upon our consciousness and on the real world which it seeks to embody. [...] We cannot comprehend the totality of the universe, but the poetic image is able to express that totality.” So, he continues, “the image is an impression of the truth, a glimpse of the truth permitted to us in our blindness.” [25] The indoor rain does not have a narrative function. It isn't talked about, and no one is seen getting wet or changing clothes.

It is the same for the gusts of wind that unexpectedly come from nowhere. An angel seen passing by near the country house. A couple, levitating. [26] In the final scene of *Nostalghia*, we see a man and his dog at the edge of a small pond before a country house in Russia, motionless, and staring at the camera. As we are slowly zooming out, we find that the man, his dog, and their *dacha* are all inside a massive Gothic ruin in Italy. Here, we are immersed in the man's insurmountable longing for home: an image that cannot be *filmed* as much as it can (metaphorically) be *painted*.

Fredric Jameson considers the structure of this scene along the lines of the literary and architectural technique of wrapping, whereby one narrative element becomes packaged in another like an enclave. “What kinds of relationships are we now to establish between these two distinct set of data or raw materials [wrapper and wrapped, ed.]

[...]" asks Jameson. "Intertextuality' was always an exceedingly weak and formalistic solution to this problem, which wrapping solves much better, being first of all more frivolous (and thereby instantly disposable), but also, and above all, because, unlike intertextuality, it retains the essential prerequisite of *priority* or even *hierarchy* — the functional subordination of one element to another (sometimes even called 'causality') — but makes that now reversible." [27] Halfway through the scene, it starts raining: another wrapper adds itself to the image without causal explanation. In keeping with Jameson's findings, there's a relationship of (reversible) hierarchy: the next wrapper, every next sphere that's wrapping the former, does not have a causal relationship to the former. And since the image is already a metaphor, the longing for home being wrapped in its displacement, it is now raining on, or inside, that metaphor itself, externalising the protagonist's feelings and shifting them onto a greater climatic and speculative scale.

MIRROR

In April 1975, Tarkovsky gave a public talk about his new film *Mirror* in Moscow. Facing tough questions from the audience, Tarkovsky became quite desperate, and said that "I should like to ask you all not to be so demanding, and not to think of *Mirror* as a difficult film. It is no more than a straightforward, simple story. It doesn't have to be made any more understandable." [28]

Despite this later stance, when the first outline for *Mirror*, then called *Confession*, was submitted, Tarkovsky and his co-writer Aleksandr Misharin began by stating that the concept for the future film was "complicated." [29]

The pitch for *Mirror* was no *précis*; it was explicitly not one. Rather, it was the broad outline of a new and experimental method, that of the *survey*, which Tarkovsky and Misharin aimed to deploy at great length and depth. The subject of their inquiry was a mother, indeed, "any mother capable of arousing an interest in the authors." Mother was not a neutral theme at all; they were engaging here with one of the Soviet Union's most important ideological focal points. [30] Tarkovsky and Misharin sought for both the generic and the specific, the mundane and the sublime, and found it in the particular universality of the Mother figure (a capitalised term). "As all mothers,

she must have had a full and fascinating life. This must be the ordinary story of a life, with its hopes, its faith, its grief and its joys.” [31] The film script in question would be a questionnaire. Tarkovsky and Misharin extruded, then flattened the Mother from heroic icon to real person back and forth, again and again, and left it mysteriously open if she should be interviewed by a “man or a woman, a psychiatrist or an electrician, a painter or an artist.” This might have also been a way of trying to avoid coming across as elitist before their Soviet reviewers. Moreover, the authors proposed a second layer of material: fictional scenes to “recreate the past,” scenes of “events connected to the heroine’s life or to the lives of people who have influenced her own fate,” preserving “external plasticity.” [32]

A film like this had never been made, neither in the Soviet Union nor outside of it. The questionnaire that was prepared for the mother showed many traces of the director’s own obsessions — brought into the script sideways in seemingly trivial questions about poets, composers, and so on.

13 You were ten when the revolution occurred. Do you remember this time well?

14 Have you ever acted despite your conscience? If so, what were the circumstances?

15 Are men or woman the stronger, do you think?

16 Sorry for this frivolous question. What food do you like?

17 How did you come to smoke? Do you regret this now?

20 How would you describe a concept such as history?

21 Why did we win the Second World War, do you think?

22 Your grandson is still a child. What books, paintings, and music have you introduced him to? [33]

Eventually the film emerges as more of a hybrid than the initial plan made it seem. The external plasticity was fueled by Tarkovsky’s own youth and by poems from his father, read by himself, and the narrator’s mother and wife are played by the same actress, Margarita Terekhova, in a highly emotional performance. Whilst one of the poems is being recited, Terekhova walks around in a strange space between past and present, in a single tracking shot, at once remembering and experiencing family life with her children. They are portraying a divorced Soviet mother. The intense melancholia is

graspable as we realise the dearness of the memories. She is crying. At minute fifteen, *Mirror* has barely started, Terekhova gazes calmly as their barn burns down while rain is dripping from the roof of the house. A bit later, it's raining indoors and memories seem to fall from the ceiling.

CUT TO

Mirror. A calmer scene with a conversation between mother and son in voice-over. We are wandering through the empty house as the son casually mentions that he dreamt about her, and asks, by the way,

“What year did dad leave us?”

“1935, why?”

More importantly, she says, her former co-worker from the print shop died in the morning.

It is, as Tarkovsky promised, a simple story at its heart, but only so if we accept that life contains painful events that must nevertheless be remembered.

Mirror is a mind-bending, sensual invitation into a fragmented whole. Terekhova transforms from metaphor-icon to character, and back again, becoming both, remaining somehow close to the spectator, and vulnerable during a long journey along the fragments. There is a lot of emphasis on her facial expressions whilst the sound is its own separate universe, unleashing poetry and voice-over to guide the story through distortion and cohesion. Tarkovsky's ambient plots and atmospheric regimes, his cinematic *climates*, break with every rule of storytelling. This is, however, not a problem for online review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, which gives *Mirror* a 100% score.

CUT TO

AEROFLOT PASSENGER PLANE, EVENING. On the flight from Moscow to Amsterdam, next to us travels a recently retired arts teacher from

Vladivostok, in the far east of Siberia. She is divorced with a daughter. Her daughter's vacations are always in Thailand, she says, which is only six hours by flight from Vladivostok. She pulls her phone out of her pocket and lets the pictures talk. Endless image streams of her daughter, spending time in Thailand.

Posing with friends. Then with friends in swimming pools. Then at the edge of swimming pools.

We try to remember the questions that Tarkovsky wanted to ask to Mother in Mirror. With this questionnaire in mind, our fellow passenger already transforms into a heroine before our very eyes. Just the honesty of her life's account is astonishing.

She is facing an abyss. She is no longer with her husband, that typical, absent father — what happened to him? Of course we do not ask. Her daughter is soon going to leave home. Mother is retired. Does she think of her students? Looking back, her proudest accomplishment must be that of raising her daughter — and the endless holiday pictures are not vanity, they are a testimony. She wants to show that her daughter is in good health. Where is she going? To Amsterdam. She says that she is scared of the idea. She will stay with a friend for two weeks.

Then, we ask a question that Tarkovsky never asked, even though he placed his own film poster on display in Mirror. What did she think of Tarkovsky?

She looks surprised, laughs, and says: "He was too difficult." She likes realist art, she says, and this is what she taught. Admittedly, not all of the experiences that Terekhova underwent in Mirror were "realist." Not all of us have seen rain falling indoors and bodies levitating; in some sense the Soviet Union was designed (but failed) to do away with such fictions. But perhaps this mother from Vladivostok has, like Terekhova, shed tears looking back at how the years went by and how the children grew up and how it all passed through her fingers like sand? How then is it that Tarkovsky's story was simple, as he himself stated, but nevertheless seen as so difficult?

After landing she disappears into the airport. A mother from Vladivostok in Amsterdam, with a phone full of pictures, and a daughter in Thailand.

CUT TO

SELF-MADE DOCUMENTARY FILM AGAINST CINEMA WITH A CAPITAL 'C,' ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE. Narrator, in voice-over, begins to speak.

NARRATOR

There are a lot of pictures of film directors pointing at something. Directors like Tarkovsky. Or Christopher Nolan. We could not find any pointing-at-something pictures of Ingmar Bergman, but there are some of him that were taken while he is looking through the camera lens. All pictures of directors on set reveal a pattern: a pattern that reveres the lone male creator in charge of a piece of subordinate machinery.

The Austrian film director MICHAEL HANEKE speaks in voice-over.

HANEKE

I want to see what I have in my head. Anything else doesn't interest me. [\[34\]](#)

NARRATOR

*Cinema cameras are pleasant objects to look at. Especially an ARRI Alexa equipped with an Optica-Elite anamorphic lens, manufactured in St. Petersburg. But why do we look at a director peeking through one? Cinema's myth is that of the lone director — the one who wants things, sees things, and frames things, pointing at them, the one who casts gazes, the lone ruler of a proto-visual world that only exists in the mind of the monarch. In casting the gaze back at a director busy pointing and ordering things around, things that we do not see, we somehow assume that we are getting access to that deeper mystery. But these pictures were never supposed to be made. The director should disappear through the film. So often must these monarchs explain their ideas to the people they work with that they can run out of ways to explain their ideas to themselves. They must invest all that they have in something that was not yet made, and become obsessive about it, just like Klaus Kinski in Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), in which he was determined to carry a steamship over a steep hill in the Amazon.*

Throughout the process, directors depend on the labor of others to drag the imaginary artwork toward its visual stage. And this process is not always linear. A film goes round and round, from idea to visual and back again. Directors should dare to

admit to themselves and others that they do not always have all the answers.

The makers of *Mirror* do as much. Not at every point do they know what their film will become. It is complicated. The patch-up of questions, memories, and poetry that is *Mirror* is an extraordinary method of construction — and a dicey one by current standards of cinematic storytelling. But this is much less the case when viewed from the standpoint of digital culture.

Though there has been a steady increase in production value of hardware and software imaging products — something as straightforward as a comparative study of smartphone camera capabilities testifies to this [35] — *digital pictures* came into the world without a plan or script as cohesive as cinema's, perhaps because there wasn't ever any structural barrier to their creation once one somehow had access to a piece of basic hardware. The same goes for the production of copies and derivatives, which became eminently possible with the use of computers. The Internet's extensive childhood was all about "poor images," as Hito Steyerl calls them, reflecting the limited bandwidth and processing power of their networks and machines, as much as the condition of redistributing the image at the expense of its original quality. A high degree of shareability over digital networks and platforms means embracing compression and loss as by-products of an image's "own real conditions of existence: swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities." [36]

Steyerl's argument on the poor image is essentially about the aesthetic of the copy: a less perfect, but more logistically agile set of pixels. In this technical reduction, Steyerl argues, lies a powerful critique of the master discourses of Cinema:

Obviously, a high-resolution image looks more brilliant and impressive, more mimetic and magic, more scary and seductive than a poor one. It is more rich, so to speak. Now, even consumer formats are increasingly adapting to the tastes of cineastes and esthetes, who insisted on 35 mm film as a guarantee of pristine visuality. The insistence upon analog film as the sole medium of visual importance resounded throughout discourses on cinema, almost regardless of their ideological

inflection. It never mattered that these high-end economies of film production were (and still are) firmly anchored in systems of national culture, capitalist studio production, the cult of mostly male genius, and the original version, and thus are often conservative in their very structure. Resolution was fetishised as if its lack amounted to castration of the author. The cult of film gauge dominated even independent film production. The rich image established its own set of hierarchies, with new technologies offering more and more possibilities to creatively degrade it. [37]

The fragmented narrative of *Mirror* recognizes a vast, ambiguous space in-between film plan and resulting image that is rather *beyond hierarchy*. Rather than about resolution, this is about makeshift structure, in which the various components appear in flux, without a clear order, reflecting the way in which Tarkovsky and Misharin wrote the film. They denied themselves the luxury of a bird's eye view over its outcome.

CUT TO

SELF-MADE DOCUMENTARY FILM AGAINST CINEMA WITH A CAPITAL 'C,' ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE RIPPED FROM YOUTUBE. Narrator, in voice-over, begins to speak, seems authoritative, but text largely borrowed from a web page that doesn't list any sources.

NARRATOR

*Some film directors, of course, now follow similarly uncertain methods. For example, the Hong Kong-born director WONG KAR-WAI shoots his films largely without script, emphasising that "what becomes 'the film itself' is ultimately a set of complex and interrelated choices." Wong "rarely sees his 'completed' films as discrete, bounded objects encapsulating a finalised vision. Wong continually revisits his work, and the titles that make up his filmography are deeply interrelated. A short film became an episode in *My Blueberry Nights*. The characters of *In the Mood for Love* were revisited with considerable variation in *2046*. *Ashes of Time* (Wong's first martial-arts film) was later re-cut entirely to fit a different vision as *Ashes of Time Redux*. *Fallen Angels* emerged from an idea that was intended to structure a*

proposed third story for Chungking Express. In none of these examples is there an authoritative or original vision; Ashes of Time Redux is not the 'director's cut' of Ashes of Time. In Wong's estimation, films are not sacred objects, but experiences subject to continual influence and change." [38]

Mirror, both in its screenplay and execution, recognises and embodies the non-plan, gaps, and question marks. The methodology of directors like Wong Kar-wai continues this trajectory. Though this is still, mostly, Cinema, there is a subtle approximation of Steyerl's poor image, at least in the obliteration of the original and the dissolution of boundaries of the distinct outcome, and the putting between quotation marks of words such as "completed" and "the film itself."

STALKER

Stalker (1979) was Tarkovsky's second and last attempt at a science fiction film. His previous attempt, *Solaris*, had been an interpretation of a novel of the same name by the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem. It was remade in 2002 starring George Clooney. *Stalker* was based on *Roadside Picnic*, a 1971 novel by the Soviet science-fiction writers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. Extraterrestrial visitors have left behind twelve mysterious "Zones," into which researchers, detectives and scavengers travel illegally. These travellers are called Stalkers. "We were the ones who introduced the word 'stalker' into the Russian language," recounted Boris Strugatsky. "Even Tarkovsky latched onto it for a reason — our word must really have turned out precise, resonant, and full of meaning." [39]

In both novel and film, the "Stalker" is cast as a desolate person, whose affairs do not bode well for himself or his relatives. Stalker is married, and they have a daughter, Monkey, a child of the Zone. For the family, there is a sensible unease in being with the restless, unaccountable nomad that is the Stalker.

The film's original shooting location in Tajikistan had to be abandoned due to an earthquake. One version of events says that the original celluloid stock was handled incorrectly by the lab, and turned out unusable. [40] Dyer, however, asserts that Tarkovsky was dissatisfied with the camera work. [41] Either way, the film was shot again, in Estonia, near a chemical plant, in sepia and in color, giving

the impression of a patchwork even if the contrast between both film stocks was an intentional choice.

A few minutes into *Stalker's* opening, there's a sepia shot of the family sleeping in one bed — in a derelict room with very high ceilings. The daughter is tucked between the parents, wearing a headscarf, sleeping close to her mother but with her face turned to Stalker. Monkey can't walk, as she was born disabled by the Zone. We know because her crutches are against the wall. The arduous slowness of this beginning shows us some warning signs already. Stalker gets up quietly, careful not to awaken them, about to embark on his last journey into the Zone. He sneaks out of the room and gets dressed. His wife follows him into the other room, and while he is brushing his teeth, she confronts him with his terrible performance as a husband and father.

Stalker leaves the house anyway to a desolate bar, which we've already seen during the opening titles, as a sombre barista made preparations. At the bar he meets a Writer and a Professor, both of whom he will guide into the Zone.

Tarkovsky was not really interested at all in making a science fiction film. He regretted that *Solaris* was one. "I was no more interested [...] in the fantastic plot of *Stalker* than I had been in the storyline of *Solaris*. Unfortunately, the science fiction element in *Solaris* was [...] too prominent and became a distraction. The rockets and space stations [...] were interesting to construct; but it seems to me now that the idea of the film would have stood out more vividly and boldly had we managed to dispense with these things altogether. I think that the reality to which an artist is drawn as a means of saying what he has to about the world, must — if you will forgive the tautology — be real in itself: in other words understood by a person, familiar to him since his childhood." [\[42\]](#) In his refusal to equip *Stalker* with otherworldly artefacts, props, and skin-tight Star Trek pyjamas, Tarkovsky made an essential contribution to science fiction. Rather than offering explicit visual proof of the phantasmagoria of the Zone, he inserted it as a key property of its entire cinematic space, shifting the burden of proof from display to belief, encouraging spectators to internalise the Zone, telling us that at its heart we will find a room in which our innermost desire will be

granted. The Strugatsky brothers had already foreshadowed this understated approach with their initial description of the Zone. They wrote, “if you take a quick look at it, everything seems OK. The sun shines there just like it’s supposed to, and it seems as if nothing’s changed, as if everything’s the same as thirteen years ago.” [43] The unfamiliar was to be announced in different, subtler, more psychologically striking ways, more as a “new normal” than as an outer-space oddity.

The trip into the Zone is to be a painstaking ordeal carried out under extreme spiritual pressure. The situation — the wasteland, its ruinous architecture, tunnels, and rooms with indoor rain — does most of the work to assert a sense of subordination to supernatural forces. The Zone, a sentient territory, “responds” to its intruders by setting traps. *Roadside Picnic* prescribed “rusty water,” and Tarkovsky took it to heart. Stalker nearly submerges in it. When ending up in the central room, where our wish is to be granted, it becomes clear, somehow, that the whole point of the journey was to test our capacity for faith, our very ability to believe. All but Stalker fail the test.

They return to the bar, accompanied by a stray dog. There, Stalker’s wife arrives with Monkey. The three of them leave the bar, together with the dog.

At home, Stalker lies down in front of a vast library. He laments the faith that he finds lacking in his fellow travellers, and then tries, dead-tired, to take off his own shoes and trousers. When he’s finally tucked in bed, Stalker’s wife addresses us directly, breaking through the fourth wall. She is smoking a cigarette, and crying, speaking of why she chose to share her life with this difficult man who is never there, and whose appearance since his early years was deemed awkward and pitiful. “My mother was against it,” she warns. “It’s just our fate, our life, that’s how we are. And if we hadn’t had our misfortunes, we wouldn’t have been better off. It would have been worse. Because in that case, there wouldn’t have been any happiness.” [44]

THE ZONE AND ADAM CURTIS

The Zone is not a country. But it is tempting to compare it to one in order to try and tackle the mysterious politics of late Soviet art. There

are almost certainly multiple explanations for it, but documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis believes in only one: the Zone is a metaphor for the Soviet Union.

In his film *Hypernormalisation* (2016), Curtis includes a few fragments from *Stalker*, and talks about the Strugatsky novel in voice-over. It is worth zooming in on this a little more.

“Hypernormalisation” is a term which Curtis borrows from the author Alexei Yurchak, who coined it in 2005. Curtis describes hypernormalisation as a process of people becoming conditioned to believe in a reality that is composed of obvious falsehoods, which are yet accepted as real, because there is nothing else.

Yurchak’s original version is more complex. He first observes the phenomenon in the official political language of Soviet bureaucracy. That language, he argues, became *hypernormalized* as through it, subsequent producers of bureaucratic discourse increasingly recycled existing statements and texts instead of writing their own. Yurchak contends that as a result Soviet political speech was “cumbersome, citational, and circular.” Political actors “converted their voices from that of the producer of new knowledge to that of the mediator of existing knowledge.” [45] Emphasis was thus shifted from the content of the language to the performative dimension of its delivery. Yurchak continues:

Binary accounts of socialism that describe it in terms of truth and falsity or official knowledge and unofficial knowledge fail to recognise precisely this performative dimension of authoritative language, reducing it instead to the constative dimension. Since authoritative discourse did not provide an accurate constative description of reality and since no competing description of reality was widely available, one could conclude that the late Soviet world became a kind of “postmodern” universe where grounding in the real world was no longer possible, and where reality became reduced to discursive simulacra. [46]

“By the 1980s,” says Curtis in voice-over, “it was clear that the dream had failed. The Soviet Union became instead a society where no one believed in anything, or had any vision of the future.” The film proceeds with an interview with a woman in the Soviet Union who is asked: “If you had a wish, what would it be?” to which she answers

with a numb and lifeless voice, “What?” Then, we watch a group of punk schoolgirls in a Russian classroom and a Russian pop song in which the voice sings “Nobody knows how fucking shitty I feel, the TV hangs across the ceiling, and nobody knows how fucking shitty I feel.” The lyrics are translated in Curtis’ signature large white Arial capitals across the screen, and grainy footage of murals of Lenin and Marx are printed on suburban high-rises in the background. “The Soviet Union became a society where everyone knew that what their leaders said was not real,” continues Curtis. The Strugatsky brothers, then, “described the strange mood that was rising up as the Soviet empire collapsed.” In the Zone in *Roadside Picnic*, “nothing is what it seems.” It is a place [...] “where reality, both what you saw and what you believed, became shifting and unstable.” *Hypernormalisation* then moves into a fragment of *Stalker*. Curtis expands the argument, claiming that Russia’s later political media strategists were influenced by the Strugatsky brothers. [47]

CUT TO

Hypernormalisation. Seen online in 360p resolution. Is this cinema? Vladimir Putin’s 2012 inauguration in the streets of Moscow, infamously devoid of people for the occasion. Cut to Monkey, carried on the back of Stalker, and then to the final, glass-moving scene. As the glass is moving to the edge of the table propelled by Monkey’s supernatural powers, Curtis confides in voice-over that for the political technologists, “reality is just something that could be manipulated.” [48]

CUT

In an interview about *Hypernormalisation*, Curtis stresses that the Zone was a metaphor for the Soviet Union, amounting to a covert act of ideology critique by the “dissident” Strugatskys. [49] It remains to be seen whether Curtis’s view is the only explanation.

CUT TO

STUDIO. An UNKNOWN WOMAN on RUSSIAN TELEVISION recites a POEM by FYODOR TYUTCHEV. There is a VIDEO WALL with floral HANDWRITING in the BACKGROUND.

UNKNOWN WOMAN

*Who would grasp Russia with the mind?
For her, a special yardstick was created*

*Her soul is of a special kind
by faith alone appreciated.* [50]

NARRATOR

*Is this not, by some token, exactly what the Zone is: a territory in
which we can only believe, and which will treat any rational
approach to itself as betrayal?*

Writing in 1861, Fyodor Tyutchev — whose poetry also makes a surprise appearance in the final scene of *Stalker* — describes, and imbues with lyrical glory, Russia, a territory that cannot be rationally understood, but which can only be believed in. It may have been the same belief that the Zone aimed to inspire. Tyutchev's words indicate that the idea of such a territory is firmly engrained in the Pan-Slavic tradition to which Tyutchev, like many other writers and artists, subscribed, and that the phenomenon of the Zone is thus much older than the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the territory's unknowable, mysterious nature is, for Tyutchev, a good thing. It is not cast in the binary light that Curtis throws on the matter.

Michael Andre-Driussi argues that the Strugatskys, rather than being disguised critics of the Soviet Union, were operating in a “Western ideological blind spot.” [51] According to Fredric Jameson, *Roadside Picnic* “moves in a space beyond the facile and obligatory references to the two rival social systems; and it cannot be coherently decoded as yet another *samizdat* message or expression of liberal political protest by Soviet dissidents.” [52]

Jameson obsesses over the Zone's ultimate magical object, the wish-granter, which Tarkovsky transformed into an empty room. “If this wish is then abstracted into a more general one — happiness, let us say [...] — it somehow meets the absent presence and implied ontological competition with that other, alien, realization of *jouissance* around which the entire novel incomprehensibly turns,” Jameson contends. The Zone is also a leftover of an alien picnic, a pleasure of a higher order. The aliens scattered around their leftovers, which become our treasures, as “these remains, which testify to the absolute indifference of the aliens to human existence [...] are also the traces and the marks of superhuman pleasure, which individual humans can scarcely imagine.” [53]

Indeed, getting *Roadside Picnic* published was challenging. Boris Strugatsky recounts how one fine day in November 1971 he and his brother finished the novel. After initially positive responses, trouble began when the prospective publisher handed the manuscript to an unnamed “professor of historical sciences” for review purposes, because “he really likes science fiction.” [54] The subsequent, long-lasting disagreement was unrelated to the Zone. Instead, the editors objected to “immoral behavior” (mostly drinking), “physical violence,” and “vulgarity.” [55]

We agree that the Zone was probably not meant as a direct metaphor for the Soviet Union, and that *Roadside Picnic* did not use the Zone as a covert attack on its political system. The better witness to this is Yurchak, who argues that the Zone can be understood as part of an “internal deterritorialisation of Soviet culture during the period of late socialism.” [56] Within Soviet culture from 1960 onwards, intellectual pursuits towards imaginary outsides began to be formed. These were composed of “foreign languages and Asian philosophy, medieval poetry and Hemingway’s novels, astronomy and science fiction, avant-garde jazz and songs about pirates, practices of hiking, mountaineering, and going on geological expeditions in the remote nature reserves of Siberia, the Far East, and the North.” [57] The Zone, then, “did not imply any concrete ‘real’ territory; it referred to a certain imaginary space that was simultaneously internal and external to late-socialist reality.” [58]

With this in mind, it is possible to compare the Zone to cyberspace. [59]

Stalker realised its visions so uncompromisingly that it would come to be seen as a prediction of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986, coincidentally, the year Tarkovsky died. The heavily contaminated area around the Chernobyl reactor — also called the Zone — approached the cinematic aesthetic of *Stalker’s* outdoor scenes. A closed area inside Ukraine to this day, filmmakers have documented its wealth of animal and plant life. Despite nuclear radiation, the Zone has become a kind of nature reserve. Some of *Stalker’s* considerable influence on visual culture is situated in the entirely hypothetical confluence between itself and Chernobyl. The link between the film and Chernobyl was forged directly by a 2007

Ukrainian first person shooter game, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl*, in which locations from the film were freely adopted and then eclectically combined with the nuclear reactor, finding its ending in a Geiger-ridden climax at the “wish granter’ — the now-materialised technology of desire inside the Zone’s central room. In the game’s opening sequence, Stalker himself, though barely alive, makes a cameo appearance.

CUT TO

THE ZONE, DAY, 1220. FRANCIS OF ASSISI addresses a GROUP OF BIRDS.

FRANCIS

My little sisters, the birds, much bounden are ye unto God, your Creator, and always in every place ought ye to praise Him, for that He hath given you liberty to fly about everywhere, and hath also given you double and triple raiment; moreover He preserved your seed in the ark of Noah, that your race might not perish out of the world; still more are ye beholden to Him for the element of the air which He hath appointed for you; beyond all this, ye sow not, neither do you reap; and God feedeth you, and giveth you the streams and fountains for your drink; the mountains and valleys for your refuge and the high trees whereon to make your nests; and because ye know not how to spin or sow, God clotheth you, you and your children; wherefore your Creator loveth you much, seeing that He hath bestowed on you so many benefits; and therefore, my little sisters, beware of the sin of ingratitude, and study always to give praises unto God.

SOFT EVIDENCE

Svetlana Alexievich’s 1997 book *Chernobyl Prayer* reports first-hand memories of survivors of the nuclear disaster. The stories traverse the outer limits of physical human experiences and *embed* the reader into a contradictory maze, in which the condition of the Zone rids the survivors of their capacity to live on as humans but does not take away their desire to do so. The survivors aspire to live truthful, happy, uncomplicated lives. But the accident changes their paths forever, in particular the *longue durée* of raising children whose physiology is deformed by the effects of Chernobyl.

Everywhere, they are treated as pariahs, as outcasts, whom it is dangerous to meet, talk to, and sit next to. One account is by Sergey Gurin, a cameraman from Minsk. Gurin ventures into the Zone thinking that he will find a front line story there, but instead he sees peasants working in the fields, with tractors and harvesters. He doesn't understand. He arrives at a scene and the response is "Ah, you're filming? Let's find you some heroes." Here are an old man and his grandson who evacuated cows from the *kolkhoz* for two days. After the interview ends, a veterinarian leads Gurin to the giant mass grave where the cattle were buried with shovels. He does not shoot the grave. Instead, he films personnel reading *Pravda's* optimistic headlines about the solidarity of the Motherland.

His camera focuses on a stork, gracefully landing on the soil. What a symbol, he says. We will win, life goes on, he says. A major challenge is to protect the celluloid from dust, which he knows is radioactive. How much of this dust is the crew breathing all this time anyway?

Party officials are said to be arriving soon, and a dirt road is quickly paved over with layers of asphalt.

Why did he come to the Zone after all? Gurin is puzzled. Life goes on. Chernobyl happened, but time passes, the river streams onward, butterflies fly, a woman stands by the river, and yet, he says, *this* happened. It reminds him of when a good friend of his died. Also then, the sun was shining, and there was music from behind a wall, he says. Swallows flew out and hid under the roof... and yet, someone he loves is dead, and will not return — at least not in time's A-theory. It is reminiscent of Ariel Dorfman's poem, *Soft Evidence*, in which the continuing normality of surroundings begs for the suspension of disbelief. Everything seems OK, but still, something isn't quite right:

*If he were dead
I'd know it.
Don't ask me how.
I'd know.*

I have no proof,

*no clues, no answer,
nothing that proves
or disproves.*

*There's the sky,
the same blue
it always was.*

*But that's no proof.
Atrocities go on
and the sky never changes.*

*There are the children.
They're finished playing.
Now they'll start to drink
like a herd of wild
horses.*

*Tonight they'll be asleep
as soon as their heads
touch the pillow.*

*But who would accept that
as proof
that their father
is not dead?
The madness goes on
and children are always children.*

*Well, there's a bird
— the kind that stops
in mid-flight
just wings in the air
and almost no body —
and it comes every day
at the same time
to the same flower
just like before.*

*That doesn't prove anything either.
Everything's the same as it was the day they took him
away [60]*

Soft Evidence traverses the uncharted territory of missing without a map. It articulates a lyrical vocabulary of powerlessness. It reverses

the burden of proof in relation to the loved one's unknowable fate inside, and embedded in, a continuing normality. The striking part is that life continues as usual, and that this in turn highlights the missing. Thus, the missing becomes articulated in images that are unrelated to it. The senses feel, and the sensuality of the surroundings enfolds the epistemic black hole of the missing.

So, in poetry as well as in cinema, the occurrence of everyday events can reinstate a particular vision with regard to plot, without there being a specifically defined relationship between the plot and what is seen. This presents itself as an antidote and rebuttal to the overabundance of visual "evidence" — in the form of jump cuts, 3D animation, and more — that is key to many films in the digital age. By blanking out explicit proof of the plot, the situation becomes internalised in the viewers. Digital Tarkovsky is about showing less technology, and implying more of it.

Gurin continues into the Zone. He films a blooming apple tree. He checks the picture: it looks good. Everything is the same. People are working in the orchard. Then, an epiphany: there is no smell. The orchard trees are blooming, but they don't smell of anything. Gurin checks with his crew members. They also cannot notice any scent in the place.

Returning to Minsk from Chernobyl by bus, Gurin overhears a conversation in which he himself is being reported dead: a cameraman, they say, was burned and killed by radiation.

Gurin, much like *Stalker*, develops a contempt for people, who will always be "peddlers of the apocalypse," he says. Instead, he is now concerned about the Zone's non-human inhabitants, its animals and plants. And he begins to return to the territory just for them. He recalls that once, there had been a plan to evacuate not just all people but also all animals from Chernobyl, but nothing came of this project. He now comes to the Zone regularly. Still, at first sight it seems like everything is OK, Strugatsky-scripted. But this apparent "new normal" of the Zone has become the very point of his films. Now that humans have disappeared from his narrative, he wants to shoot from the perspective of wild animals, he says. In the 13th century, Francis of Assisi preached for the birds, talked with them,

conversed with them. And that is what Gurin believes in now as well. But in doing so, he is limited to human means: the language in which he talks, the camera with which he films. As a result, his subject matter has advanced beyond the possibilities of his paintbrush. He is painting a two-dimensional, proto-Renaissance picture of another dimension. [61]

CUT TO

Stalker, the FINAL SCENE. Monkey, wearing her headscarf, is reading a book in front of a stained window. Fluff whirling through the air and smoke coming from incense or tea. After reading she puts it down and recites a poem, in voice-over:

MONKEY

*I love your eyes, my darling friend
Their play, so passionate and brightening
When a sudden stare up you send,
And like a heaven-blown lightning,
I'd take in all from end to end.
But there's more that I admire:
Your eyes when they're downcast
In bursts of love-inspired fire
And through the eyelash goes fast
A sombre, dull cast of desire... [62]*

The words are by Fyodor Tyutchev. [63] After the recital, Monkey with her sombre stare moves around glasses on the table, using the powers of her telekinetic thought.

Why Tyutchev now, read in voice-over by a child who never speaks and, on the verge of the film's end, suddenly turns out to be — at least in part — a normal Russian girl, reciting the classics? There is no straightforward explanation. Alison Croggon hints at the general interwovenness of Tarkovsky's work with poetry, as it "influences the hypnotic rhythms of Tarkovsky's editing and the composition of his image-making." [64] Further, there exists a certain alignment between Tarkovsky and Tyutchev. As we've seen, Tyutchev is also a master of working with the absence of evidence triggering the suspension of disbelief.

Another of his poems, *Silentium!*, sings the praises of not speaking, of not revealing, of remaining quiet. As in many of Tyutchev's works, this state of being is then saturated with a deep sensuality:

*Speak not, lie hidden, and conceal
the way you dream, the things you feel.
Deep in your spirit let them rise
akin to stars in crystal skies
that set before the night is blurred:
delight in them and speak no word.
How can a heart expression find?
How should another know your mind?
Will he discern what quickens you?
A thought, once uttered, is untrue.
Dimmed is the fountainhead when stirred:
drink at the source and speak no word.
Live in your inner self alone
within your soul a world has grown,
the magic of veiled thoughts that might
be blinded by the outer light,
drowned in the noise of day, unheard...
take in their song and speak no word. [65]*

As a sensual invitation to remain quiet, *Silentium!* is in equal parts revolutionary and politically compliant. It is also cinematic: it gives us another take at Tarkovsky's decision, in *Stalker*, relaying the story's "inner self" beyond the screen in a naked form. The suspension of disbelief, necessary for immersion into a fictional narrative, is achieved by shifting the Zone's burden of proof from the screen to ourselves, from hard to soft evidence, and where the only thing that matters is what's inside, which is also, at the same time, completely unverifiable. As Tyutchev suggests, "a thought, once uttered, is untrue." The Zone's silence is sentient, aware, unspoken, unaddressed, unaddressable, deceptive, and true.

Tyutchev's final poem about a lover's eyes was not what Tarkovsky originally had in mind for the ending. *Stalker's* shooting script had the film ending with Monkey thinking of food, scent,

clothes, and other sensual things: “And I want pastries too; chocolate buns with syrup and smoked eels... and everything that’s got a scent: flowers, nice perfume... mushroom soup smells nice... and also a silk dress, which rustles when you stroke it, and also my innermost wish is for a fur muff, soft and warm, fluffy and smooth...”

[\[66\]](#)

TO ME YOU ARE WEIGHTLESS

A few years ago we mentioned Tarkovsky to a Dutch film producer who had just re-watched *The Godfather*. He smirked at hearing the name, as if we had pulled a dusty UAZ-452 van from our barn to compare it with his Toyota Prius. Why is this? In keeping with Tyutchev, we did not ask and spoke no word.

Something similar happened in Spring 2012, when an audience gathered in a sold-out venue in New York on the occasion of the release of a new book. Written by Geoff Dyer, *Zona: A Book About a Film About a Journey to a Room* was a closed reading of *Stalker*, structured in two parts, with amusing, intimate, and thoughtful digressions by the author, a committed Tarkovsky fan. The evening initially promised to be a gathering of like-minded Tarkovsky aficionados. Dyer’s fellow critics were not insignificant names: Oscar-winning film editor Walter Murch, filmmaker Michael Benson, film critic Dana Stevens, and writers Phillip Lopate and Francine Prose. During the evening, a DVD copy of *Stalker* was screened, because there exist, according to Dyer, no analogue copies of the film in the US.

In the silences between Dyer’s exalted praise, a certain, subtle scorn toward Tarkovsky began to seep in, primarily on the part of Phillip Lopate. After watching several long excerpts of *Stalker*, the film critic, essayist, fiction writer, poet, and teacher began to poke at Tarkovsky’s screenwriting, attempting to compare the film to a horror movie or a western.

Lopate: “They just sit talking about their wasted lives. [...] Sometimes I resist Tarkovsky. You know, I just get to that point, I think well you know, I’m not sure the writing is good enough to go toe-to-toe with Chekhov, and so sometimes I feel like there’s a lot of bluster. [...] I feel pummeled and bullied sometimes, and I just want to record my scepticism and resistance.”

Dyer initially agrees, though not wholeheartedly: “I think it’s a really good point that some of the writing is pretty weak I think...”

The discussion then moved on to the scene that follows the family’s departure from the bar. Dyer describes it as follows:

Switch to colour, to the daughter, Monkey, in profile and in close-up, swathed in a golden-brown headscarf, walking through the bare blur of trees, with the dog. So, colour is not the unique preserve of the Zone after all. Something that is almost snow — sleet, gobs of rain, sky-blossom — is falling. The music on the soundtrack is that spooky electronic drone again that we heard right at the beginning, before they went to the Zone. We can still see only her head bobbing along but the focus is not as tight and we watch her moving through more of the landscape, covered in snow or pale ash. The lake or river is a dull grey. As the camera pulls back we see that Monkey is not walking; she is on her father’s shoulders, and the landscape [...] has a desolate beauty.

[67]

Monkey being carried by Stalker is not a miracle of science but, given the preceding hours of painstakingly slow film and (relative) absence of warmth, a kind of miracle of love. A dystopian factory landscape reveals itself in the background. It is a Moscow power station on Ulitsa Vavilova, a place now fully embedded in the urban fabric, but a wasteland at the time. [68] We feel a certain bitter sense of happiness which Stalker’s wife will later put into words. Monkey’s being lifted is the everyday miracle. Marina Tsvetaeva, in 1916, did the same with her four-year-old daughter:

*There are clouds — about us
and domes — about us:
over the whole of Moscow
so many hands are needed!
I lift you up like a
sapling, my best burden: for
to me you are weightless. [69]*

Dyer so loves the scene that he cannot conceal his enthusiasm. “That scene where we see Monkey’s head in the headscarf, when we assume she’s walking, and then we see she’s being carried on

her dad's shoulders, it is one of the most profound moments in any work of art."

Then, referring to the film's final scene, he continues: "And then that last scene with the telekinetic movement of the glasses [...] it just sends shivers up one's spine."

Rather unassumingly, Dana Stevens asks Dyer: "Why Monkey on his shoulders?"

Dyer: "Why on his shoulders... I guess because she can't walk."

Stevens: "No, I mean, why is that moment one of the most profound works of art for you?"

Dyer: "Oh... god, uh... because it gets to me so deeply. And I think it's that... oh, it just looks so beautiful, with the headscarf. It's an inexhaustible power, I think. Does it not do it for you?"

Lopate: "You have to just trust it's a miracle because you see it in front of your eyes... but in this case it's a negative miracle, the miracle doesn't happen." [\[70\]](#)

Dyer (mocks): "Oh yes, that's why." (laughter)

Walter Murch intervenes: "There's a few interesting things to consider here. One is that the film is so constructed that it can open itself up to a large number of interpretations over an extended period of time, which is a good signifier that it can endure as a work of art. You can analyse the film knowing Soviet history at the time, and it will resonate. It will accept that. But then you can also look at it as questions that are generally posed to human beings on earth, which is, why are we here? And what is life all about, what are we supposed to do, what is dangerous, what is not, what is responsibility? And it will accept all of these things as well. I saw a television programme about filmmakers and the films that inspired them. And there was one dedicated to Martin Scorsese, about fifteen years ago, I think, and he was talking about, in his intense Scorsese kind of way, kind of like how Geoff is talking, about a film that deeply influenced him, and the more he talked, the more you wanted to see this thing that had so deeply stamped Marty with this open-hearted realisation of the potentials of cinema. And then in fact, after a long digression from him, they did show the scene that he was talking about. They cut to the scene, and my reaction was: *What?* (laughs) *You saw that in that?* So there's an element of that here..." (laughter)

Dyer: “Very politely put.”

Murch: “Geoff talks openly quite about this, and this is, it’s really an interesting peculiar thing, which is the dynamics between an audience of one, and film... and it could be any work of art, but we’re talking about film, which is... film is a language, it’s a way of communicating, a very complex system of signs and signifiers, and use of time, and at a certain point in your life — Geoff was 22 when he saw this film — you are primed for a revelation of some kind. And something is likely to happen and some film is likely to trigger that realisation. [...] For Geoff, it was *Stalker*. [...] The film is worthy of being the can-opener that opens up a new way of looking at the world for you. But the other point that Geoff makes that this then becomes less accessible to subsequent generations. [...] Future generations look and say: *what?* [...] They who have been influenced by *Reservoir Dogs*, they go look at this and go: *what?*”

Deeply ingrained in Cinema’s cathedral are figures of authority doing the thinking on behalf of absent others — “the audience,” “filmgoers,” “subsequent generations,” — often as part of an argument directly or indirectly targeting someone else’s film. The stakes in producing even a modestly scaled feature film are too high to not make assumptions on behalf of others, so part of this tendency is to be understood and excused. But the *longue durée* of this practice cannot be ignored. What if all works of art were to be judged by critics wrapping their own judgment in that of absent others? This is in fact what the Soviet censors did. [71] What looks like wisdom in words of calm — that Dyer’s appreciation for *Stalker* is generationally configured, and young people will not see it the same way — is not grounded in the film or in the scene which Lopate calls an “anti-miracle.”

Through duration, texture, and construction, Tarkovsky’s work challenges the mindset of the digital age with its proliferation of screens, uninterrupted engagement, and profusion of invitations to suspend disbelief, political and artistic. Tarkovsky’s ability to make a comeback — to renew his appeal to an audience — is demonstrated when the discussion in New York takes an unexpected turn. Michael Benson comes to the rescue in response to Murch’s remarks: “I just wanted to report some little family story. When my son was seven,

you know, and was already deep into the Cartoon Network, and fast cuts and all that stuff, and didn't yet read very well, I happened to have *Stalker* on a laptop, and I said to him, you know this film, by the great Russian director Tarkovsky, the premise of the film is you have to get through a certain amount of obstacles, and at the center of this Zone, which appears after something mysterious happens, there is this room and if you get to that room your innermost wish is granted to you. And he listened and he was very interested, you know, he said 'Well, I'd like to see it,' you know, so I opened the thing and I thought I would get ten minutes before he said 'OK, Cartoon Network time.' He watched the entire thing straight through. This is a film in Russian, which he didn't understand, with subtitles he couldn't read. And he was just completely fascinated. And then about two weeks later we're on a Croatian island called Lošinj — I should explain, my son is bilingual in Slovenian and English but he doesn't speak Russian — and he had his friend over, and the two of them watched the film again. Straight-through. Two seven-year olds, it was the cutest scene, lying on the bed with the laptop open in front of them, watching straight through, 'cause he explained to his friend: you have to get to this room, and then your innermost..."

[Laughter]

Benson: "So I felt that there is hope, somehow." [72]

PART III

DIGITAL TARKOVSKY

In the first chapter, we outlined the contours of a cinema of the interface and its relationship to time, referring to the slow, textured film works of Tarkovsky. In the second chapter, we focused on a number of Tarkovsky's films and identified elements of his artistic method. These included lyricism as a critical instrument, poetic and semi-supernatural, "speculative concrete" interventions (indoor rain, fire in the rain, levitation, objects falling from the ceiling, telekinesis, "wrapping"), experimental screenplay, and a minimalist sci-fi, rid of almost all depiction of technology, shifting suspension of disbelief to the situation itself.

In this chapter, we will be confronting Tarkovsky with technological, discursive, and cinematic aspects of present-day digital culture. This is tricky, because in many ways, Tarkovsky never left the stage of official cinema. There exists a whole array of films and directors who have been paying continuous homage to Tarkovsky since he passed away. Many contemporary films, including mainstream ones, feature "Tarkovsky moments," using essentially direct citations. For example, in 2016 the Russian documentarian Misha Petrik compiled a two-and-a-half minute video, *The Revenant by Tarkovsky*, in which he placed seven scenes from Alejandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant* directly next to scenes from *Ivan's Childhood*, *Andrei Rublyev*, *Mirror*, *Stalker*, and *Nostalghia* [1], and indeed it appears as if most of these seven scenes are lifted from their original. The film theorist Steven Shaviro, writing about Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life* (2011), says it "remediates, or works as a sort of remake of, Tarkovsky's *Mirror*." "But," Shaviro adds, "despite the atavistic reversion to the creation or origin of the universe, Malick's film has a much lessened sense of thick temporality than Tarkovsky's does." [2] Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) has been compared to Tarkovsky for its length, "philosophical questions rather than action scenes," and slowness. [3] The film's cinematographer, Roger Deakins, has said that this "was [...] kind of nice, because [Tarkovsky's] name isn't exactly praise in Hollywood!" [4]

The use of Tarkovskyan motifs in studio features, however subtle and artistic, is distinct from what we call Digital Tarkovsky. Digital Tarkovsky is both a phenomenon of time and image in the digital age

— the interaction between Tarkosvsky films, Tarkovskyan-like reality, and the digital devices that now mediate them — and a style and filmmaking method. Tarkovsky forces us to reflect on the kind of cinematic gaze and visual textures that belong in a life entwined with digital platforms, whilst simultaneously incorporating an evolving sense of media literacy about them.

Thus, our point is not about a Hollywood movie emulating Tarkovsky's style. It is about a kind of platform monasticism, devoted to the spiritual expression of the discrepancy between the different modes of temporality and image that emerge between digital megastructures, reality, and users; a gravity between the computational assemblage and its human and non-human inhabitants. The Tarkovskyan long take, it seems, is one of the media spaces in which this discrepancy can be made visible. It creates a Now, capable of accommodating other Nows; a Now that looks back and ahead, and eventually can do away with the distinction between past and future.

This monasticism is grounded in limited means of production. It has little to do with no-holds-barred CGI, but everything to do with already knowing where CGI is going. Thus, Digital Tarkovsky's poverty is differently configured from Steyerl's aforementioned "poor image," a term that describes a trade-off between the availability and quality of online images; a trade-off between distribution and resolution, and a shift in power from original to copy. The poverty of Digital Tarkovsky is more structurally related to the world of ideas that film brings to life versus the means it has to do so; it is thus also much more closely related to the relationship between script and film as a whole than to the quality and resolution (or lack thereof) of the final image.

(ALMOST) NO COPYRIGHT

The basis for Digital Tarkovsky exists in the dispersion of his work into a variety of media formats: from celluloid onto magnetic tape, then onto DVD discs, BluRays, and into MPEG encodings. Physical distribution means poor images, moving from a physically contained commodity to an online, immaterial, for-free video file, encountering compression, and therefore loss of information, in the transition. And the result is a kind of sacrilege; the power graph of Cinema is

disrupted, as the original images were also receptacles for the inherited authority of its system.

We may see this transition as one between media — the simple act of copying existing content onto new carriers, as happens with almost any creator whose once-analog content appears in the online sphere. However, the un-vaulting of Tarkovsky from cinema’s filing cabinets into a magnetic, then digital space, should also be considered against the backdrop of intellectual property in Russia.

In Russia, the regulation of intellectual property developed differently than in the West. As legal scholar Connie Neigel explains, “Russia produced many of the great composers and authors of the world, but it lagged behind Western Europe in its development of copyright law by almost a century.” [5] When, in 1886, 175 countries signed the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, Russia was not among them. According to Neigel, this was due to three main reasons:

First, and most importantly, signing the Convention would have resulted in huge costs to the Russian government. Because Russia was a prolific consumer of foreign literature, it would have been obligated to pay royalties to Convention members. Second, the Russian government regarded the Convention as a device to protect the interests of publishers while ignoring the interests of authors and the greater society. Finally, adherence to the Convention would have forced the Russian government to abolish its policy of free translation. The Russian government relied on freedom of translation to disseminate creative works to its multilingual population. [6]

Prior to 1973 (when the USSR joined the Universal Copyright Convention), works in the Soviet Union were not generally registered under copyright. Even after joining the UCC, “the Soviet Union retained the power to compel licensing of foreign works and to exclude certain forms of intellectual property from protection,” such as computer software and algorithms. [7] The Soviet Union dissolved before further amendments to its copyright law could take full effect.

The 1990s brought about an era of video and software piracy in Russia. [8] Although most of the pressure for copyright reform came from the United States, Washington’s main target for international

efforts in this area continued to be China. In accordance with both the geopolitical agenda as well as differences in types of copyright transgressions occurring in the two countries, the US took a softer stance against Russia. [9]

Parallel to this was the idiosyncratic development of the Russian Internet, a detailed account of which would require a separate study. As of 2005 — the year YouTube was founded — only roughly 15% of the Russian population was using the Internet; 121,753,627 Russians were not. The origins of digital Tarkovsky can be found in the confluence of this lenient attitude towards copyright infringement, and a slow but certain turn towards the Internet.

On April 14, 2013, a Facebook post by The School of Russian and Asian Studies, [10] an unrecognized educational facility in Woodside, California, enthusiastically exclaimed:

Mosfilm has placed six Tarkovsky films (including *Stalker* and *Solaris*) on YouTube. With subtitles! (Click the rectangle icon at the bottom of the screen if you don't see them). The Internet is awesome. [11]

This is something that any Western studio of comparable size to Mosfilm would most likely refrain from. In publishing these films on YouTube, Mosfilm surrendered any potential reward from its private circulation, declaring obsolete the entire infrastructure of DVD, Blu-Ray, and Video-On-Demand. There is a direct parallel between a lack of recognition of intellectual property in pre-communist Russia and the USSR, and the online release of long-form cinematic masterpieces 20 or more years later.

CUT TO

DEPRESSED VOICE-OVER, drab streets in an unnamed central European city. Poor video quality. Timecode says September 2004.

NARRATOR

*On a sobering note, at some point in Spring 2018, Mosfilm limited its YouTube access to Tarkovsky films to viewers logging in from Russia, ending a five-year global euphoria of free and unlimited access. From Europe, it is a particularly eerie experience to see how the inaccessible, empty shell of *Stalker* keeps acquiring views. [12]*

CUT TO

SERVER FARM, slow tracking shot. STOCK FOOTAGE with WATERMARK imprinted. A SECOND VOICE-OVER, much more UPBEAT, is taking over.

SECOND NARRATOR

We need to talk about four things: platform-based moving image, the advent of low-cost cinematic instruments, the rise of photorealistic 3D computer graphics, and about moving image that's directly produced and mostly seen by machines, infrastructures, and megastructures.

NARRATOR (IRRITATION)

That's an entirely different story.

CUT TO

NETFLIX menu page, flicking through series titles. "Recommended for You." The series Troy. It looks like something you've seen before.

SECOND NARRATOR

Subscription-based content platforms like Netflix and Spotify have closed down that older idea of poor quality and free availability. They are seamless and impeccable media experiences. They have really done away with the idea of download sites, and torrent sites, and the digital space as a cyber-anarchic pirate machinery. Digital moving image is no longer paired to loss of pixel. The platform is the original.

NARRATOR

Except for... (SIGHS, thinks of Game of Thrones) Did you know that some e-books from Strelka Press circulate on the internet as low-quality .pdfs? Including, possibly, this book?

CINEMATIC TOOLS

In parallel to the rise of platform-based production and distribution, there is a steep increase in the quantity of augmented consumer equipment available in almost-cinema quality. Instead of tightly limited means of production, as there used to be in Goskino and Mosfilm, there is semi-universally distributed hardware and software.

The Australian electronics firm Blackmagic, which has its roots in celluloid film digitization, in 2014 released a Pocket Cinema Camera, which was advertised as a new tool for "documentary, episodic

television production, television commercial or independent film in the true quality of digital film. With its extremely compact size, you can covertly shoot important and historic events such as wars, protests, and other conflict in cinema quality and get a more realistic record of the event.” [13] These words make the camera feel like a belated gadget for the Arab Spring and subsequent revolutions. Around the same time, writings circulated with headlines like “How mobile phones are changing journalism practice in the 21st Century.” [14]

Indeed, the Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera appears to have been branded as a cinematic alternative to the smartphone, or a smartphone-sized alternative to a video camera, propelling journalistic and documentary media production into the realm of cinema. This brings to mind a quote from Bernard Stiegler which was referred to at the beginning of this essay: “Life is *a/ways* cinema.” The way life is captured and represented is part of this impetus, and software and hardware lend this process an ever-more explicit edge, by which the image begins to reflect other qualities than merely the recording of the event. Dynamic range, color grading, and texture come into play, changing the image’s content — not so much directly, but more so its attitude.

Apps like Filmic Pro are designed to render the output of iPhone and Android phones more professional. The US-based Moondog Labs produces anamorphic optics that can be mounted on the iPhone, and which have been used to create several award-winning feature films. [15] Over and over, we read the magic word: *cinematic*.

CUT TO

MALE VOICE reading headline and first few lines from PROMOTIONAL ARTICLE. We see the DUBAI MARINA with a slowly moving shot at TWILIGHT.

MALE VOICE

Shooting Cinematic iPhone Footage with Filmic Pro. A couple weeks ago, I was out with my iPhone SE and a little camera app called Filmic Pro. Once graded in Resolve, the results blew me away. [16]

In summary, an upsurge in consumer-grade digital tools and enhancements makes it easier to emulate or approach the

aesthetics of film, and at the same time, imbues the everyday with a desire for the cinematic. And we are left wondering what this sense of the cinematic is really about. Ironically, in most “cinematic” camera and lens comparison videos, extremely mundane things — like streets, buildings, and fountains — are filmed in order to compare the technical prowess of various tools.

Indeed, the word “cinematic” appears to be less about capturing an extraordinary event, object, or subject matter, and more about the longing for an extraordinary type of gaze.

It is possible that the recent, and frequent, use of the term “cinematic” in the context of digital images is a way to subtly reconfigure the user’s own distance and vantage point towards the image, while simultaneously guiding the other’s immersion into it. It is possible that these enhancements of the digital image will not, in the longer term, lead to anything like “proper” cinema, but will have their longest and fullest effects as part and parcel of the very interfaces that their augmentation was supposed to surpass. It is possible to read the word “cinematic” here as applying to an image that has partially fictionalized itself; an image that has become unquestionable, as its pronunciation has been imbued with built-in epicness.

A third point. Despite a new flurry of low-cost anamorphic, epic, and cinematic tools, digital cinema is increasingly less about optics. In the words of Lev Manovich, it is moving “from Kino-Eye to Kino-Brush.” [\[17\]](#) The Kino-Eye refers to a filmmaking concept of the avant-garde Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov, in which he wanted the camera to surpass the human gaze. The Kino-Brush, then, is the digital paint brush that opens up every image to fabrication, manipulation, and painterly creation. As Manovich points out, all digital moving images are made of the same electronic points, the smallest addressable elements in a raster. “The computer,” he stresses, “does not distinguish between an image obtained through the photographic lens, an image created in a paint program, or an image synthesized in a 3D graphics package, since they are made from the same material — pixels. And pixels, regardless of their origin, can be easily altered, one substituted for another, and so on.

Live-action footage is reduced to just another graphic, no different from images that were created manually.” [18]

This description, correct as it is, does not take into account some of the cognitive and psychological consequences that likely come from the “Kino-Brush.” More precisely, technology’s ability to emulate life-like human forms has laid bare the existence of a so-called “uncanny valley,” [19] in which the close-to-realistic simulation of humans, both two- and three-dimensionally, results in a repulsive surrealism felt by the human observer. The “valley” itself is a dip in a graph that represents the degree of affinity felt by a human observer for (in this order): an industrial robot, a toy robot, a zombie, a prosthetic hand, a theatrical doll, and a healthy human being. The deepest point in the valley coincides with the zombie. The graph was drawn in 1970 by the Japanese robotics professor Masahiro Mori. Here, he describes the unreal sensations felt around the lower areas of the graph:

One might say that the prosthetic hand has achieved a degree of resemblance to the human form... However, when we realize the hand, which at first sight looked real, is in fact artificial, we experience an eerie sensation. For example, we could be startled during a handshake by its limp, boneless grip together with its texture and coldness. When this happens, we lose our sense of affinity, and the hand becomes uncanny. In mathematical terms, this can be represented by a negative value. Therefore, in this case, the appearance of the prosthetic hand is quite human-like, but the level of affinity is negative, thus placing the hand near the bottom of the valley...This example illustrates the uncanny valley phenomenon. [20]

In a video essay titled *Goodbye Uncanny Valley*, Alan Warburton holds that computer-generated imagery has now fully conquered the valley; in other words, we are capable of generating life-like, photoreal 3D, leaving behind the eerie sensations, zombies, and prosthetic hands. Beyond the uncanny valley’s frontier, says Warburton, lies “post-truth,” in which it is impossible to establish real from fake anymore. Indeed, “[t]he easier it becomes to counterfeit an image, as political propaganda for instance, the more difficult it is to

convince someone that an image is real. As computer graphics get better, we believe all images less.” [21]

Mainstream cinema has used the possibilities of CGI to enhance movement and accelerate action scenes, which can be read as a visual accompaniment to the breakneck speed of technological change itself. Steven Shaviro observes that “[i]n recent action blockbusters by the likes of Michael Bay and Tony Scott, there no longer seems to be any concern for delineating the geography of action, by clearly anchoring it in time and space. Instead, gunfights, martial arts battles, and car chases are rendered through sequences involving shaky handheld cameras, extreme or even impossible camera angles, and much composited digital material — all stitched together with rapid cuts, frequently involving deliberately mismatched shots.”

Shaviro calls this technique “post-continuity.” [22] It initially may have been intended to strengthen continuity and prevent viewers from getting bored, but it ends up having the opposite effect. In this process, Shaviro discovers relationships with other forces in contemporary society. He concludes that there is much more to be said about the *aesthetic sensibility* of post-continuity styles, and how this sensibility is related to other social, psychological, and technological forces:

Post-continuity stylistics are expressive both of technological changes (i.e. the rise of digital and internet-based media) and of more general social, economic, and political conditions (i.e. globalized neoliberal capitalism, and the intensified financialization associated with it). Like any other stylistic norm, post-continuity involves films of the greatest diversity in terms of their interests, commitments, and aesthetic values. What unites them, however, is not just a bunch of techniques and formal tics, but a kind of shared *episteme* (Michel Foucault) or *structure of feeling* (Raymond Williams). [23]

POST-DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY

In Digital Tarkovsky, the disruptive forces of technology and capitalism are no longer new. It provides a slower spatio-temporal fabric that interweaves itself with default presumptions of acceleration through technology and capitalism. Digital Tarkovsky

takes the spectre of techno-political force as a given, to the extent that it is wrapped inside, as well as wrapping up many things we see in physical reality. Whilst it is inescapable, it is also ambient.

Will Self comments that in a digital age “our ability to produce suspension of disbelief is greater than our suspension of disbelief. Our capacity to produce images of high fidelity is greater than our capacity to see them.” [24] Self means to illustrate the pointlessness of adding speed and detail beyond a human viewer’s physical capacity to conceive of it (which may be entirely different once we think about a non-human viewer watching), but inadvertently, he also illuminates a kind of post-digital media literacy: one in which viewers *already know* that technology is omnipresent, and that cinematic techniques that overzealously attempt to demonstrate this in fact achieve the opposite. Digital Tarkovsky draws upon the above mentioned media literacy, and incorporates it into a cinematic impetus for the interface. The specific importance of Tarkovsky here is best summarized by Dyer, the point being Tarkovsky’s insistence that an artwork’s treatment, style, approach, and vision should be preponderant over its subject matter. Indeed, Dyer finds a citation from Flaubert that “could have come straight from Tarkovsky’s diaries”:

“From the standpoint of pure art, one might establish the axiom that there is no such thing as a subject — style in itself being an absolute manner of seeing things.” [25]

Thus, the over-determination of the present by subject matter is no new problem for filmmakers. A similar problem haunted the making of Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959). Film theorist Patricia Pisters recalls that Resnais, initially tasked with making a documentary film about the 1945 atomic bomb on Hiroshima, finds himself unable to do so, and asks writer Marguerite Duras to write a script. “During their long conversations, the filmmaker and writer were wondering about the strange fact that while they were talking about Hiroshima, life took its usual course while new bombs were flown over the world. *This is how they arrived at the idea of focusing on a small-scale personal event [...] with the catastrophe constantly in the background.*” [26] This is similar to notions of “soft evidence” as encountered in the work of Ariel Dorfman and Svetlana

Alexievich. The event is so large that it is ungraspable. And yet life continues as if nothing happened, as the new normal.

CUT TO

*A SLOW PAN of IMAGERY of a TERRITORY, seen from ABOVE.
A VERY LONG TAKE, SHOT from a SATELLITE.*

NARRATOR

There was a fourth point.

SECOND NARRATOR

I can.

Electronic and computational objects are increasingly endowed with vision. Unlike humans, machines do not get tired of filming the same thing for a very long time, so they are the champions of *longue durée*. All things carry vision or aspire to it; a sentient electronic universe is the ecosystem of transmitters of previously unrecognized points of view. Hotel lobbies, cars, and washing machines are becoming directors of photography, with long single takes. Cinematic production is becoming everything's default setting.

Such a cinema in its most basic types — say, a geostationary satellite recording swathes of Earth's surface, or a security camera filming a store from the same angle continuously — produces visual information that is intelligible in a different way than a story is. The data produced by these vantage points aren't stories, but observations: proto-narrative temporal excavation sites.

Also, the world's largest telescopes are, arguably, nothing more than cosmo-cinematic cameras pointed at space. These giant apparatuses do not use optics, but rather radio and infrared spectral signals. For example, the Mauna Kea Observatories, located on top of an active volcano in Hawaii, are a collection of different instruments that use their otherworldly vantage point to probe deep into space. In Ian Cheney's gorgeous film *The Most Unknown* (2018), a multi-disciplinary team of scientists gets the opportunity to use the Mauna Kea Observatories' most powerful telescope for an entire night. They begin with an attempt to get a really good shot of a distant star. It soon appears on the monitor: we see a huge five- or seven-tipped light, filling the entire screen, giving a palpable sensation of getting up close and personal with the universe. Staring into deep space-time, the scientists are still bound to the circadian

rhythm of their home planet, as they try to steal the last good material before Earth's sunrise ruins their shot at around 5am. This is perhaps a simple example of how 'B-theory' spacetime may be mapped onto 'A-time' cinematic linearity. It speaks to the importance of duration — the timespan of a single night on earth — as well as that of the camera's vantage point, situated on an outpost of the world itself. The attempt to get a clear shot involved moving the furthest away from the inhabited world. Coincidentally, the observatory — which is essentially a set of cameras and connected equipment — looks like a high-tech monastery.

DASHCAM DURATIONS

The machine will record everything in front of its sensors. But normally, the temporal aspect of this mode of seeing gets edited out, so the viewer ends up with only the dramatic content. In dashcam video compilations, for instance, of which there are many Russian examples on YouTube, we only see road accidents. [27] This produces, through their compilation, a compressed “story” implying that “reality” in “Russia” (all quotation marks intentional) is a series of crazy accidents.

To the actual dashcam film as cinema, it matters much more that most of the time, nothing much is going on in its *longue durée*. Precisely, it is mainly the road accidents that get uploaded, shared, and platform-economized. But the actual machine vision of the dashcams is not so much about road accidents; it is about their ability to record the same event collectively from different points of view. An example of this is their famous simultaneous portrayal of a cosmic accident: the Chelyabinsk meteorite, which passed over the Urals on February 15, 2013. The meteorite entering Earth's atmosphere produced a magnificent, bright light, which was filmed by dashcams from hundreds of different places, angles, positions, and resolutions, during and around the same time. [28] In a space and time where, often, “nothing” seems to happen (meaning: no road accidents), the dashcam's vision constantly intersects with other dashcam visions. Their unintentional portrayal of the environment — such as with the passing meteorite — adds volumes to their impact. Dashcams, like web cams, are the (s)lowest common cinematic denominator of a slightly shifting present. Since the meteorite

passed with a speed of about 69,000 km/h, it produced a kind of fast-traveling horizontal sunrise that was different for everybody.

Andreas Sudmann stresses that “[t]he narrative ‘script’ of a game is not just ‘given’ for us to read or watch; instead, it is generated on the fly, in the moment of interaction between the game and the player.” [29] In the same way, machine vision, as the undirected outcome of the endowment of technology with sensing capacities, can make visible films that nobody knew we were watching, or games that nobody knew we were playing. [30]

The sense in which these seeing and sensing machines are digitally Tarkovskyan, though, is in the longevity and concentration of the shots, as well as in what they make visible. It is important to note that this idea of the long take, one that includes plenty of time before and after the event or action, is the way machines watch reality already.

For example, the images that satellite cameras produce of the Earth’s surface take the shape of long stretches of fabric, looking ragged at the edges. They enter into the frame as a vertical pan covering a particular “row” along a “path.” [31] They only become “whole” and identified with the planet that they cover once they are stitched together to form an unbroken surface, a single territory corresponding to the topology of the planet, over which we can hover (such as in Google Maps’ satellite view, or in Google Earth). But these stretches of surface texture on their own, before being stitched together, are much more autonomous and “cinematic” as long, tracking shots, demonstrating that before these machine visions are purposed to serve representational ends, they can be something else as well. [32]

In a lecture, Paul Schrader, screenwriter of *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*, decried what’s becoming of “transcendental style” in film. In 1972, Schrader devoted a book to this style. It was republished in 2018. The transcendental style is understood to express “a spiritual state by means of austere camerawork, acting devoid of self-consciousness, and editing that avoids editorial comment,” [33] and can be seen as adjacent to aspects of the works of Tarkovsky. Speaking about the long take, Schrader recalls that Tarkovsky’s artistic hero, French director Robert Bresson, was

among the first to realize that “this unnecessary protraction of time — holding onto an image for longer than the viewer expects — had a phenomenological effect.” [34]

Schrader argues that transcendental style has separated itself from mainstream film and formed a separate genre of slow cinema. The ultimate outcomes, says Schrader, will now be “surveillance cameras, art galleries, and mandalas.” [35]

Consider the surveillance camera and its machine vision. This does not yet include what those machines think about what they see, what they think about others seeing the same things, or how their vision, their seeing, their being, changes reality.

CUT TO

AMSTERDAM, NIGHT STORE. Security camera. The SECOND NARRATOR enters the night store.

NARRATOR

Machines and their cinema control the long take.

CUT TO

INSTAGRAM STORIES, projected on a vertical cinema screen. An AUDIENCE watches in amazement.

NARRATOR

I have not looked at Instagram for about a day and a half. It is to be punished by a Tarkovsky-length, user-generated, vertically oriented smartphone film. Upon opening the app, I see a lengthy array of red-circled icons that belong to the people I follow. These are “Stories,” short movies shot by users. They disappear after a day. Partially out of courtesy, I start watching the stories, and if I weren’t feeling totally excited about my own amazing life, I would start to question my life now. Is it so amazing after all? Here on Stories, I see dancing people, encounters with good-looking cats, sunrises and sunsets, museum visits, smiling people, food, urban scenery shot from a car. More dancing people overlaid with interfacial meta tags: emojis.

I put the phone aside as the movies play, and as I write these words, they pass by on the screen that is next to the keyboard. The Stories go on, and on. There’s an office with a Christmas tree-like structure surrounded by Yves Klein-blue materials, blob-

shaped; I have no idea what they are and am not interested in finding out. People standing in a room. A street scene with a guy with a baseball cap, likely shot in a Russian Caucasus republic. Beautiful users with iPhones, filming themselves in the mirrors of bathrooms of amazing clubs. A subway in Asia. Someone in a multicolored, jagged-shaped, post-graphic design tight suit. Flowers. Colors. Doors. Architecture. Night, day. Is this cinema? Maybe. But I'm feeling something else as well. I'm feeling that I'm missing out. [36]

The room is in some way a movie theatre. The iPhone is in some other way the big screen. So indeed, it is in some way an uncharted cinema of the interface. Yet because of the way in which Instagram's platform design interacts with its viewer's attention, and the way in which the presence of others on the platform interacts with that, this is also a tainted cinema that plays strange tricks on its filmmakers and viewers. The Mauna Kea telescope commanded uninterrupted attention and got it. But platform time is punctured with interruptions and disjunctions. In its attempt to draw users in, and determine what is "relevant" for them, platforms prefer certain signals over others. These preferences structure, in the longer term, the habitual preferences of the user in ways that have been called "filter bubbles." [37]

The more people you follow, the more "stories" there are for you to watch. The longer it's been since you checked into the platform, the longer the duration of the accumulated "storyline" will be. The quotation marks are intentional, because there is no story, there is just, technically, a sequence of visual material that we are inclined to construct a story-like temporal unity out of. The shots belong to an unknown, multi-authored movie that will vanish, edited by your subscription to other people's curated versions of their online lives, the simultaneity of their media production, interfacially challenged and intensely overlaid with information, emojis, and so on, in an algorithmically specified order. Indeed, the distinct "product" of this process is film, but its definition as such is incomplete, as interaction with the user's attention is key.

This accumulated timeline, which the user on the receiving end consumes as a fast-cut live stream, contains pre-recordings of

events that the viewer was, in the majority of cases, physically absent from. That matters, because seeing the film is, in the first place, predicated on the existence of a “social” relationship between sender and receiver. Undergoing this stream of moving images is something distinct from watching TV news — in which images and words pass across the screen, reaching a general public. A one-way interaction premised on the absence of a direct social link. Instead, on platforms, the term “FOMO,” or “Fear Of Missing Out,” is listed as one of the primary negative emotions experienced by users who frequently use Instagram, which has been dubbed the “worst social media for mental health.” [38] A whole range of emotional conditions, including but not limited to the constant lurking fear of missing out, can lead to a near-permanent inability to establish priorities; there is always something else that appears to be more rewarding. [39] More precisely, viewing the event through the app, from a distance, may highlight, to the user, their own physical distance from the scene, and thus that their life may be felt as lacking in some of the things that the depicted lives of others so ostentatiously possess — fun, happiness, beauty, intensity. A platform’s way of determining and enacting the relevance of a link, a post, a picture, or a movie to the attention of a user appears to near systematically favor the noteworthy aberration over the generic or the everyday. As we’ve argued elsewhere, the platform supplements hues of intensity, drama, rage, and heroism to this dull normality. [40] Something of this is to the effect of an electronic re-creation of a sensation of medievalism, in the way of its heightened sense of emotional contrast. As Johan Huizinga wrote in his famous opening lines of *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, “every experience had that degree of directness and absoluteness that joy and sadness still have in the mind of a child.” “All things in life,” he continued, “had about them something glitteringly and cruelly public.” [41]

The long film of Instagram Stories is a mixed bag of augmented realities that the user is in some sort of social relationship with, even if many of the ties present between sender and receiver may be quite weak in actual life. In any case, the glances cast by the platform have far-reaching effects; in its manifold relationships to the physical world, Instagram functions as a filter, as a stratifier, and as a

cause of segmentation, sharply delineating who and what does and doesn't get seen and valued. [42]

The platform's user interface is sticky. For that reason, its features, including "autoplay, endless scroll, reverse chronological timelines, and push notifications," were, as Elizabeth Stinson reminds us, "once heralded as frictionless, user-friendly design." But these design features are also increasingly called out as manipulative. [43]

This is a cinema whose content and texture are the self-representation and self-production of a social fabric under the pressure of platform design. We can, and perhaps should, imagine different, cooperative platforms, which reflect conditions that users want for themselves. But for the moment, cinema for the interface is continuously co-produced and conditioned by the larger capitalist structures in and through which it subsists. This doesn't result in pure art, but in massively scalable contradictions, with increasingly uninterrupted user engagement. [44]

Digital Tarkovsky — the cinematic version of the discrepancy between the speed of and on the platform, and the speed of lived experience under the atmospheric omnipresence of all-encompassing computational force — is thus also providing a setting for what could be called propaganda. We are alluding to the sense of ideological distortion that is implied by a user's experience of, and participation in, highly personalized media bombardments. The longer term effects of the filter bubble — a topology that was initially designed to embody "relevance" for a user — now include the scaling up of ideological distortions that were firstly matters of attention and distraction; a user's occasional clicks and swipes, their micro-durations set against circadian rhythms, and sequences of media seen or unseen. When scaled up, these distortions are all-encompassing caricatures. [45] They are contributing to the sense of a shared reality becoming increasingly fluid, like the Zone. So yes, life is always cinema. But who is directing?

CUT TO

STALKER

What made you...

PROFESSOR (*whispering*)
What — why?

STALKER
Why did you stop him?

PROFESSOR
What?! I thought it was you...

Writer stands ten steps from the building, not daring to move a muscle. He looks at them.

STALKER (*to WRITER*)
Come back! Quickly!
Writer, puffing, approaches them.

WRITER
What happened? Why did you stop me?

STALKER
It wasn't us who stopped you.

WRITER
Then who did? [\[46\]](#)

END NOTES

PART I

[1](#) Jon Rassel, “Report: Smartphone Usage Set to Overtake Time Spent Watching TV in China,” *TechCrunch*, April 19, 2018, <https://techcrunch.com/2018/04/19/report-smartphone-usage-set-to-overtake-time-spent-watching-tv-in-china/>

[2](#) Charles Soukup, *Exploring Screen Culture via Apple's Mobile Devices: Life through the Looking Glass* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 22.

[3](#) Romeo Vitelli, “Can Smartphones Make Us More Absent-Minded?” *Psychology Today*, September 29, 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/media-spotlight/201709/can-smartphones-make-us-more-absent-minded>

[4](#) Julie Shiels, “Waiting: Rediscovering Boredom in the Age of the Smartphone,” *The Conversation*, September 25, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/waiting-rediscovering-boredom-in-the-age-of-the-smartphone-83207>

[5](#) Marcus Gilroy-Ware, “Smartphones Are Stealing Our Time: this New Year, I Want to Claim It Back,” *The Guardian*, December 29, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/29/smartphones-time-new-year-apps-resolution-facebook>

[6](#) Carlo Giordanetti and Eric Limer, “Internet Time,” podcast audio by Brooke Gladstone and Bob Garfield, *On the Media*, WNYC, February 17, 2014, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/tldr-15-internet-time/>

[7](#) Esther Weltevrede, Anne Helmond and Carolin Gerlitz, “The Politics of Real-time: A Device Perspective on Social Media Platforms and Search Engines,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, no. 6 (June 2014): 140–141, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0263276414537318>

[8](#) *Ibid.*, 142.

[9](#) *Ibid.*, 135.

[10](#) Leif Weatherby, “Delete Your Account: On the Theory of Platform Capitalism,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, April 24, 2018, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/delete-your-account-on-the-theory-of-platform-capitalism/>

[11](#) Aatif Sulleyman, “Netflix’s Biggest Competition Is Sleep, Says CEO Reed Hastings,” *Independent*, April 19, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/netflix-downloads-sleep-biggest-competition-video-streaming-ceo-reed-hastings-amazon-prime-sky-go-a7690561.html>

[12](#) Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 113.

[13](#) *Ibid.*, 117.

[14](#) *Ibid.*, 117–118.

[15](#) Jonathan Jones, “Andy Warhol’s Iconic New York Anti-Films Come to London,” *The Guardian*, April 4, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2013/apr/04/andy-warhol-films-ica-chelsea>

[16](#) Jonathan Crary contends that “in its profound uselessness and intrinsic passivity,” sleep is “an uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism.” For Crary, sleep is “a ubiquitous but unseen reminder of a premodernity that has never been fully exceeded.” (Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), 10-11).

[17](#) Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 113-14.

[18](#) *Ibid.*, 120.

[19](#) “Temporary Editorial Appeal” in “The Firm That Paid Michael Cohen \$500,000 Is Deeply Tied to a Russian Oligarch, Records Show,” *Mother Jones*, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/05/the-firm-that-paid-michael-cohen-500000-is-deeply-tied-to-a-russian-oligarch-records-show/>

[20](#) Dennis Dieks, “The Physics and Metaphysics of Time,” *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2012): 104, https://www.ffri.hr/phil/casopis/abstracts/8_1_7.pdf

[21](#) Dan Falk, “A Debate Over the Physics of Time,” *Quanta*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.quantamagazine.org/a-debate-over-the-physics-of-time-20160719/>

[22](#) Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, chap. 9, http://www.fisica.net/relatividade/stephen_hawking_a_brief_history_o

f_
time.pdf

[23](#) But *Batman*, *Alien*, and *Game of Thrones* do not correspond to observations of ordinary life either.

[24](#) Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 118.

[25](#) Dieks, “The Physics and Metaphysics of Time,” 105–106.

[26](#) The specific terms used here came up while discussing the *Geocinema* project by Asia Bazdyrieva, Soveig Suess, and Alexey Orlov, which expressly occupies itself with satellite imagery. The New Normal, Strelka Institute, Moscow, May 2018.

[27](#) Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: an Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. Frank Lubecki Pogson (Edinburgh: Riverside Press, 1950 [1910]), 91, <https://archive.org/details/timeandfreewilla00berguoft>.

[28](#) Dieks doesn’t regard the idea of a “privileged Now” very highly and maintains that an A-theory, even if it were somehow proven right, doesn’t affect four-dimensional representations of spacetime. He argues that “any representation of the history of the universe during part of its existence can do without the specification of a Now.” (Dieks, “The Physics and Metaphysics of Time,” 109).

[29](#) We disagree with limiting this to “events” and “people.” Films do not need to be about people. As we all know, stones have feelings. Computational matter probably has them too.

[30](#) Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 10.

[31](#) *Ibid.*, 12.

[32](#) *Ibid.*, 14.

[33](#) Whilst protention is a form of consciousness in relation to objects that will occur or re-occur, like melodies, more recently coined phenomena like “pre-emption” (forestalling) and “hyperstition” take on a more active role in the production of the future.

“Hyperstitional thinking hijacks the present-forming daring interventions into conditions of cybernetic governance that foreclose contingency. Hyperstitions are not imaginary, they are virtual fictions situated in the chaotic unfolding of the Real.” (Jack Kahn, “Hyperstition: Truth Is Science Is Fiction,” review of film *Hyperstition*,

by Christopher Roth and Armen Avanessian, DIS,
<http://dismagazine.com/blog/77351/hyperstition-truth-is-science-is-fiction/>).

[34](#) Stiegler, *Technics and Time* vol. 3, 14.

[35](#) Ibid., 18.

[36](#) Ibid., 19–20.

[37](#) Bradford Skow, *Objective Becoming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

[38](#) Fernand Braudel, “Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée,” *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 13, no. 4 (1958): 729.

[39](#) Fernand Braudel, *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 26.

[40](#) Ibid., 107.

[41](#) Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “It’s freezing and snowing in New York--we need global warming!”, Twitter post, November 7, 2012,

<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/266259787405225984>

[42](#) Shane Denson and Julia Leyda, eds., *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film* (Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016). See also: <http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/>

[43](#) Gideon Lewis-Kraus, “The Exacting, Expansive Mind of Christopher Nolan,” *New York Times*, October 30, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/02/magazine/the-exacting-expansive-mind-of-christopher-nolan.html>

[44](#) The Russian name for World War II. But of course this anecdote is fiction, so it does not matter here.

PART II

[1](#) Citations from Marina Tsvetaeva’s poetry here and throughout this book are from Elaine Feinstein’s 1971 translation from Russian to English, first published by Oxford University Press.

[2](#) Paul Lewis, “‘Fiction Is Outperforming Reality’: How YouTube’s Algorithm Distorts Truth,” *Guardian*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/feb/02/how-youtubes-algorithm-distorts-truth>

[3](#) Klint Finley, “The GIF Turns 30: How an Ancient Format Changed the Internet,” *Wired*, May 28, 2017,

<https://www.wired.com/2017/05/gif-turns-30-ancient-format-changed-internet/>

[4](#) Sven Nykvist, "Sven Nykvist's Lighting Process on 'The Sacrifice'," trans. Trond Trondsen, *Cinephilia & Beyond*, <https://cinephiliabeyond.org/documentary-sven-nykvists-lighting-process-sacrifice/>

[5](#) Under the headline "Everyone is a filmmaker now," *Film School Rejects* maintains that "a civilian's act of holding a camera in their hands can have a wide spectrum of effects and consequences, and in so doing tell us a great deal about everyday filmmaking's relationship to power." (Landon Palmer, "Everyone is a Filmmaker Now: The Sociological Lessons of Rosewater and Nightcrawler," *Film School Rejects*, February 3, 2015, <https://filmschoolrejects.com/everyone-is-a-filmmaker-now-the-sociological-lessons-of-rosewater-and-nightcrawler-8083980af592/>).

[6](#) Geoff Dyer, *Zona. A Book About a Film About a Journey to a Room* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 10.

[7](#) Power of Film and Moving Image, "Will Self on the Death of Film," YouTube video, February 13, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Le43WJxNWU>

[8](#) Horizontal gravity is quite neatly visualised while uploading a video to the Internet. The "progress bar" that indicates the upload status shows a parallax visual pattern that is running in the opposite direction of the data going upstream. It makes the uploader see that s/he's running up against a countercurrent. Tarkovsky's films transfer this feeling of horizontal gravity to an audience.

[9](#) Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time Within Time. The Diaries 1970-1986*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 8-9.

[10](#) Natasha Synessios, Introduction, *Collected Screenplays*, by Andrei Tarkovsky, trans. Natasha Synessios and William Powell (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), xv.

[11](#) Colin Asher (architecto), "Re: Tarkovsky's 'Stalker': Deep as a Mirror," comment, *The Artifice*, March 19, 2014, <https://the-artifice.com/tarkovskys-stalker-deep/>

To add to this, it was not so much *freedom* that the Soviet system took away from Tarkovsky. By his own admission, artistic freedom did not interest him. But the Soviet system did sometimes prevent

him from enjoying his international stature and success to the full extent. As a frequent participant in the most prominent European film festivals, Tarkovsky significantly contributed to the cultural brand of Soviet Russia in the West. But at the same time, the officials treated him like a caged bird that must be constantly reminded that individual achievement cannot be the end goal of art. In the early 1980s, Tarkovsky felt nothing less than betrayed by Goskino, who, at the zenith of his working life, had prevented him from winning an important jury prize in Cannes with *Nostalgia* (1983). Goskino had sent Tarkovsky's nemesis, the director and "epitome of Soviet cinematic orthodoxy" Sergei Bondarchuk, to Cannes to represent the USSR in the festival's main jury. Bondarchuk fought "like a tiger" to prevent *Nostalgia* from winning any awards. Tarkovsky concluded: "Bondarchuk's behavior made me understand that this very negative attitude was the official position of Goskino. And that was a terrible blow for me. It was betrayal. It was a knife into my back." (John Gianvito, ed., *Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 156).

[12](#) Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, xiii.

[13](#) Gianvito, *Tarkovsky Interviews*, 36.

[14](#) Dyer, *Zona*, 41.

[15](#) Thomas Redwood, *Andrei Tarkovsky's Poetics of Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 21.

[16](#) Mizoguchi was responsible for "some of the most delicately choreographed tracking shots and striking examples of deep-focus staging seen the world over." (Jasper Sharp, "Kenji Mizoguchi: 10 Essential Films," *BFI*, August 22, 2016, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/kenji-mizoguchi-10-essential-films>).

[17](#) Andrey Tarkovsky and Sergei Parajanov, *Mirror & Pomegranate. Works From the Private Archives of Andrey Tarkovsky and Sergei Parajanov* (London: White Space Gallery, 2012), 57.

[18](#) Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 57.

[19](#) *Ibid.*, 58.

[20](#) Politkovskaya's 1980 university dissertation at Moscow State University had been on the Russian and Soviet poet Marina Tsvetaeva —whose work is characterised as passionate and lyrical, especially in the face of adverse and bitter circumstances which

Tsvetaeva endured in her life until her suicide in 1941. The critic Annie Finch commented that “Tsvetaeva is such a warm poet, so unbridled in her passion [...]” Annie Finch, “Marina Tsvetaeva and the Poet-Pair,” *Poetry Foundation*, March 8, 2009, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2009/03/marina-tsvetaeva-and-the-poet-pair>

[21](#) Anna Politkovskaya, *A Dirty War. A Russian Reporter in Chechnya*, trans. John Crowfoot (London: The Harvill Press, 2001), 161–162.

[22](#) Gianvito, *Tarkovsky Interviews*, 4.

[23](#) Jule Selbo, *Screenplay: Building Story Through Character* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 48.

[24](#) Valeriya Baeva, “Bergman and Tarkovsky: Dialogue Through Film,” *Cinema Scandinavia* 3 (June 2014): 47–48, <https://cinemascandinavia.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/cinema-scandinavia-june-2014-interactive2.pdf>

[25](#) Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 106.

[26](#) Scenes like these can be described in terms of the Hegelian concept of the “speculative concrete.” The speculative concrete was devised by Hegel to open up the concept of the mystical to reasoning: it is neither a supernatural occurrence nor a simple observable fact. By means of the speculative concrete, as a re-interpretation of the concept of mystery, and trying to open it up to reasoning. Narrative in Tarkovsky often is simply the impetus to create instances of the speculative concrete, such as in the case of Ivan’s dreams. Robert Williams asserts that the speculative concrete is “a unity in and through difference that is a mystery [...]. It is neither fraudulent superstition nor supra-rational supernaturalism, but rather the speculative, dialectical-rational totality itself.” (Robert R. Williams, *Hegel on the Proofs and the Personhood of God: Studies in Hegel’s Logic and Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)).

Among Hegel’s philosophical followers in Russia who deployed the concept of the speculative concrete was the thinker Ivan A. Il’in. (Ivan A. Il’in, *The Philosophy of Hegel as a Doctrine of the Concreteness of God and Humanity, Vol. Two: The Doctrine of Humanity*, trans. Philip T. Grier (Northwestern University Press,

2011), <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/the-philosophy-of-hegel-as-a-doctrine-of-the-concreteness-of-god-and-humanity-volume-two-the-doctrine-of-humanity/>).

[27](#) Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 101.

[28](#) Tarkovsky, *Diaries 1970-1986*, 370.

[29](#) Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 257.

[30](#) The Soviet Union had a Mother Heroine medal for mothers who had ten children or more. Dissolved in 1991, the distinction was restored in 2008 in Russia as the Order of Parental Glory.

[31](#) Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 257.

[32](#) *Ibid.*, 260.

[33](#) *Ibid.*, 271–272.

[34](#) Lamos Ignoramous, “Watch ‘24 Realities per Second’ Michael Haneke Documentary,” review of film *24 Realities per Second*, by Michael Haneke, *Filmslie*, accessed September 10, 2018, <http://filmslie.com/24-realities-per-second-michael-haneke-documentary/>

[35](#) A 2018 study on smartphone cameras finds that smartphone cameras now have surpassed most professional video cameras in their capacities: “[I]n terms of image processing, Canon, Nikon, Pentax and the other players in the DSC market are behind what Apple, Samsung, Google, and Huawei can do.” (Lars Rehm, “Disruptive Technologies in Mobile Imaging: Taking Smartphone Cameras to the Next Level,” *DxOMark Image Labs*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.dxomark.com/disruptive-technologies-mobile-imaging-taking-smartphone-cameras-next-level/>)

[36](#) Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 44.

[37](#) *Ibid.*, 33–34.

[38](#) Landon Palmer, “6 Filmmaking Tips From Wong Kar-Wai,” *Film School Rejects*, August 28, 2013, <https://filmschoolrejects.com/6-filmmaking-tips-from-wong-kar-wai-6eece37a9ffa/>

[39](#) Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic*, trans. Olena Bormashenko (London: Gollancz, 2012 [1972]), 196.

[40](#) Danny Leigh writes that “[...] *Stalker* itself had a catastrophic history. While it's a well-known part of the film's legend that it had to be shot twice after the original film stock was ruined in the lab, it's less talked about that the entire production had by then already had to vacate its original location in northern Tajikistan after a major earthquake. Touched as such by disaster in its early life, the film would end up embraced by it. [...] [T]he toxic legacy of eventually filming near a chemical plant outside the Estonian capital of Tallinn has been blamed for killing both lead actor Anatoli Solonitsyn and in 1986, just a few months after Chernobyl, Tarkovsky himself.” (Danny Leigh, “The Powerful Resonances of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*,” *The Guardian*, April 8, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2011/apr/08/andrei-tarkovsky-stalker-japan-fukushima-nuclear>.)

[41](#) Geoff Dyer, “Danger! High-radiation arthouse!” *The Guardian*, February 6, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/feb/06/andrei-tarkovsky-stalker-russia-gulags-chernobyl>

[42](#) Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 199.

[43](#) Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic*, 16.

[44](#) This monologue has been copied from the closed caption English subtitles to Mosfilm's YouTube release of *Stalker*, accessed in March 2018. The location of the video was <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGRDYpCmMcM>, yet Mosfilm has, for no stated reason, taken it down since. Now it is accessible only from Russia.

In the shooting script, the monologue was situated not at *Stalker*'s home but at the bar scene where his wife addressed not the audience but the Professor and the Writer. Her text, here, was as follows: *You know mum was against it. You had already learned, I expect, that he is God's fool... The whole neighbourhood was laughing at him... He was such a pitiful bungler... And mum used to say, 'He's a Stalker, a condemned man, always under arrest, and remember what sort of children Stalkers have...' I didn't even argue. I knew all of that — that he was a condemned man, always under arrest, an about the children... But what could I do? I was sure I'd be fine with him — I knew, of course, that there'd be a lot of grief too,*

but bitter happiness is better than a depressing, grey life—or maybe I just told myself that afterwards. But he just came up to me and said: ‘Come with me.’ And I’ve not regretted it once. Not once! I’ve felt bad, I’ve felt terror, I’ve felt shame. But even so, I never had any regrets, nor envied others —that’s just how fate was, how life was, how we were. Even if our life were without grief, it wouldn’t be any the better for it. It would be worse. Because it would also be without happiness, and without hope. (Synessios, “Stalker,” in Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 415).

[45](#) Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 75.

[46](#) *Ibid.*, 75.

[47](#) In a 2015 interview, former Putin advisor Gleb Pavlovsky asserts that he has been influenced, in his dissident years in the Soviet Union, by the Strugatsky brothers, among others — authors that were part of the so-called “New Age” literature. Pavlovsky: “New Age was all about enhancing human potential and freedoms, and fitted easily with the idea of rebellion.” (Gleb Pavlovsky, “A dissident’s tale,” interview by Gleb Morev, *openDemocracy*, May 29, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/gleb-morev-gleb-pavlovsky/dissident%2525E2%252580%252599s-tale>).

[48](#) *Hypernormalisation*, dir. Adam Curtis, BBC, 2016.

[49](#) Adam Curtis, “No Future,” podcast audio by Will Menaker, Matt Christman and Felix Biederman, *Chapo Trap House*, December 12, 2016, <https://soundcloud.com/chapo-trap-house/episode-65-no-future-feat-adam-curtis-121216>

[50](#) Стихи, “Федор Тютчев. Умом Россию не понять...” [Fyodor Tyutchev. Who Would Grasp Russia with the Mind...], YouTube video, December 16, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQaqpbN-_w (Translation by John Dewey).

This famous verse was suggested in 2017 by Carolyn Kissane, academic director at NYU’s Center for Global Affairs, as a way for audiences to “understand” (note the irony, since the poem forecloses understanding) what motivates Russian President Vladimir Putin. (Carolyn Kissane, “To understand Russia’s Vladimir Putin, you need to know what drives him,” *CNBC*, July 13, 2017,

<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/07/13/to-understand-russias-vladimir-putin-you-need-to-know-what-drives-him-commentary.html>).

[51](#) Michael Andre-Driussi, “The Politics of *Roadside Picnic*,” *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, August 1, 2013, <http://www.nyrsf.com/2013/01/the-politics-of-roadside-picnic-by-michael-andre-driussi.html>

[52](#) Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future. The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007), 294.

[53](#) *Ibid.*, 75.

[54](#) Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic*, 198.

[55](#) *Ibid.*, 204–206.

[56](#) Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 159.

[57](#) *Ibid.*, 160.

[58](#) *Ibid.*, 160–161.

[59](#) The Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital civil rights organisation in the US, keeps on its website to this day John Perry Barlow’s 1996 “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace,” which bombastically begins as follows: “Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.” (John Perry Barlow, “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace,” *Electronic Frontier Foundation* [February 8, 1996], <https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>)

[60](#) Ariel Dorfman, *Soft Evidence*, 1988. This poem was part of a collection, initially assembled by Amnesty International during the Chilean military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, which lasted from 1973 until 1990. Ariel Dorfman was one of the critical voices, though he wrote from outside of Chile.

[61](#) All our references to *Chernobyl Prayer* by Svetlana Alexievich have been based on the book’s Dutch translation, *Wij houden van Chernobyl*, trans. Arjen Uijterlinde and Jos Vonhoff (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2016), 143-152.

[62](#) This text has been copied from the closed caption English subtitles to Mosfilm’s YouTube release of *Stalker*, accessed in

March, 2018. The location of the video was <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGRDYpCmMcM>, yet Mosfilm has, for no stated reason, taken it down since. Now it is accessible only from Russia.

[63](#) In a different translation, Fyodor Tyutchev's poem "I love your eyes, my dear" can be found at <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/i-love-your-dear-eyes/>

[64](#) Alisson Croggon, "Tarkovsky's *Stalker*: A Poet in a Destitute Time," *Theatre notes*, September 21, 2007, <http://theatrenotes.blogspot.com/2007/09/tarkovskys-stalker-poet-in-destitute.html>

[65](#) Translation by Vladimir Nabokov.

[66](#) Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 416.

[67](#) Dyer, *Zona*, 180.

[68](#) For a breakdown of the *Stalker* shoot see: Sergey Bessmertny (immos), "Remembering the Filming of *Stalker*," trans. Yulia Shlapina and Alexandra Bondar, LiveJournal post, January 4, 2017, <https://immos.livejournal.com/80622.html>

[69](#) Marina Tsvetaeva, *Verses About Moscow*, 1916. Tsvetaeva's daughter Ariadna Efron, born in 1912, is the "best burden" mentioned in the poem.

[70](#) Phillip Lopate's "curb your enthusiasm" type of position is one that he often enacts, and sometimes gracefully. After reading a long piece by Lopate on the essay film, we became more convinced about the way in which he cares for combinations between text and image, and also why that leads him to his particular *chagrin* (a very Lopate word) about Tarkovsky's script and plot. For example, Lopate writes: "[...] Godard may be the greatest film artist of our era. I will not dispute that. But strictly considering the development of the essay-film, his influence has been a mixed blessing." He just always happens to be a bit sceptical. (Phillip Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, eds. Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 120).

[71](#) Dyer reminds us that around its release "officials [...] complained about [*Stalker*], hoping the film could be 'a little more dynamic, especially at the start.' Tarkovsky erupted: it actually

needed to be slower and duller at the start so that anyone who had walked into the wrong theatre would have time to leave before the action got under way. Taken aback by the ferocity of this response, one of the officials explained that he was just trying to see things from the audience's point of view... He was not able to finish. Tarkovsky couldn't give a toss about the audience. He only cared about the point of view of two people, Bresson and Bergman." (Dyer, *Zona*, 21).

[72](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6Uzt-T8Uljenx1PG6d31SA) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6Uzt-T8Uljenx1PG6d31SA>, "Tarkovsky Interruptus," YouTube video, May 11, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4JyapuJyY>
PART III

[1](https://www.petrick.ru/the-revenant-by-tarkovsky) Misha Petrik (Petrik), "The Revenant by Tarkovsky," Vimeo video, February 4, 2016, <https://www.petrick.ru/the-revenant-by-tarkovsky>

[2](http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1123) Steven Shaviro, "SCMS Response," *The Pinocchio Theory*, March 9, 2013, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1123>

[3](https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/10/7/16418780/movie-of-week-stalker-tarkovsky-blade-runner) Alissa Wilkinson, "Stunning Philosophical Sci-Fi Was Perfected in 1979 with Tarkovsky's *Stalker*," *Vox*, October 7, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/10/7/16418780/movie-of-week-stalker-tarkovsky-blade-runner>

[4](https://variety.com/2017/artisans/awards/blade-runner-2049-roger-deakins-interview-1202579857/) Roger Deakins, "Roger Deakins on 'Blade Runner 2049' and That Elusive First Oscar," interview by Kristopher Tapley, *Variety*, October 4, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/artisans/awards/blade-runner-2049-roger-deakins-interview-1202579857/>

[5](https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1197&context=lcp) Connie Neigel, "Piracy in Russia and China: A Different U.S. Reaction," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 63, Number 4 (Autumn 2000): 180, <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1197&context=lcp>

[6](#) *Ibid.*, 183.

[7](#) *Ibid.*, 185.

[8](https://www.russia-briefing.com/news/russia-ranks-second-in-pirated-software-users-after-china.html/) *Ibid.*, 187. See also: Russia Briefing, "Russia Ranks Second in Pirated Software Users, after China," May 22, 2012, <https://www.russia-briefing.com/news/russia-ranks-second-in-pirated-software-users-after-china.html/>

[9](#) Neigel, "Piracy in Russia and China," 199.

[10](http://sras.org) <http://sras.org>

[11](#) SRAS, “Mosfilm has placed six Tarkovsky films (including *Stalker* and *Solaris*) on YouTube,” Facebook post, April 15, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/SRASFB/posts/537367782980197>

[12](#) See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGRDYpCmMcM>, where *Stalker* is, now accessible only from Russia.

[13](#) “Blackmagic Design — Pocket Cinema Camera,” Maxx Digital, accessed September 10, 2018, <https://maxxdigital.com/products/for-review-blackmagic-design-pocket-cinema-camera>

[14](#) Rima Marrouch, “How Mobile Phones Are Changing Journalism Practice in the 21st Century,” *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, March 4, 2014, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/how-mobile-phones-are-changing-journalism-practice-21st-century>

[15](#) For example: “Our 1.33X Anamorphic Lens is designed for serious iPhone filmmakers and photographers who want to elevate their look, creating compelling, professional-looking films and photos. — Expansive 2.4:1 video or 16:9 stills while preserving full sensor resolution — Organic flares and distortion for added character and depth — Cinema-grade glass and precision anodized aluminum design — Dynamic clamping mechanism mounts securely for run-and-gun filming — Protective case, lens cap, and microfiber storage bag included.” (“1.33X Anamorphic Lens — for iPhone 8+,” Moondog Labs, accessed September 10, 2018, <https://moondoglabs.com/collections/lenses/products/1-33x-anamorphic-adapter-lens-for-iphone-8-plus>

[16](#) Richard Lackey, “Shooting Cinematic iPhone Footage with Filmic Pro,” *cinema5D*, July 25, 2016, <https://www.cinema5d.com/shooting-cinematic-iphone-footage-filmic-pro/>

[17](#) Lev Manovich, “What is Digital Cinema?” in Shane Denson and Julia Leyda, eds., *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film* (Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016), 41.

[18](#) *Ibid.*, 27.

[19](#) For example: Ryan Whitwam, “Super-Detailed CGI Human Skin Could Finally Cross the Uncanny Valley, Bring Realistic faces to games and movies,” *ExtremeTech*, July 5, 2013,

<https://www.extremetech.com/extreme/160535-super-detailed-cgi-human-skin-could-finally-cross-the-uncanny-valley-bring-realistic-faces-to-games-and-movies>

[20](#) Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley: The Original Essay by Masahiro Mori," trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki, *IEEE Spectrum*, 12 June, 2012 [1970], <https://spectrum.ieee.org/automaton/robotics/humanoids/the-uncanny-valley>

[21](#) Alan Warburton, "Goodbye Uncanny Valley," Vimeo video, October 10, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/237568588>

[22](#) Steven Shaviro, "Post-Continuity: An Introduction," in Denson and Leyda, eds., *Post-Cinema*, 51.

[23](#) Ibid., 60.

[24](#) Power of Film and Moving Image, "Will Self on the Death of Film," YouTube video, 22:10. February 13, 2017, <https://youtu.be/6Le43WJxNWU?t=22m9s>

[25](#) Geoff Dyer, *Zona. A Book About a Film About a Journey to a Room* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 30.

[26](#) Patricia Pisters, "Flash Forward: The Future is Now," in Denson and Leyda eds., *Post-Cinema*, 148.

[27](#) Our favorite compilation is: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeDmukA2s7ILZdMwphJy0uw>, "Just Ordinary Day of Dashcam in Russia," YouTube video, March 4, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u13cDmKpo-4>

[28](#) For example: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgXQTRpIY3iBDrNchFcroSw>, "Amazing Russian Meteor Dash Cam Footage Compilation 2013 Part 1," YouTube video, February 24, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_ILTQwYeN0

[29](#) Andreas Sudmann, "Bullet Time and the Mediation of Post-Cinematic Temporality," in Denson and Leyda, eds., *Post-Cinema*, 316-17.

[30](#) The future of machines-as-directors-of-photography will certainly interact with the ideas and work of predecessors, such as the Dziga Vertov, as well as the German documentary maker and artist Harun Farocki. Farocki coined the term "operational images," as he was, in the words of artist Trevor Paglen, "one of the first to

notice that image-making machines and algorithms were poised to inaugurate a new visual regime. Instead of simply representing things in the world, the machines and their images were starting to ‘do’ things in the world.” (Trevor Paglen, “Operational Images,” *e-flux* 59, no. 11 (November 2014), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/59/61130/operational-images/>).

[31](#) See for example the Landsat live viewer at <https://earthnow.usgs.gov/observer/>

[32](#) At Strelka Institute *The New Normal* programme’s 2017-18 edition, the GEOCINEMA project has emerged by Asia Bazdyrieva, Alexey Orlov, and Solveig Suess, which uses, among other sources, satellite imagery. The project states that “‘Geocinema’ is an invitation to a genre and a provocation to decenter the human within vastly distributed processes of image and meaning making. With aspirations twisting across various geographies and temporalities, we want to alienate these sensing techniques which are framing movements of the cosmos, oceans, organisms, atmospheres, in order to queer given narratives about earths.” (Asia Bazdyrieva, Alexey Orlov and Solveig Suess, “Geocinema,” accessed September 10, 2018, <http://www.geocinema.network/>).

[33](#) Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018 [1972]).

[34](#) The lecture took place on the occasion of the re-publishing of Paul Schrader’s 1972 book, *Transcendental Style in Film*. (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8B79SXbCi79ob5yxWEJc1Q>, “Paul Schrader: Rethinking Transcendental Style in Film,” YouTube video, April 26, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0CCMz7nJdo>

[35](#) Ibid.

[36](#) No reason to feel sorry for the narrator — because this story is fictional.

[37](#) The filter bubble was first diagnosed by Eli Pariser as an automated information prioritization mechanism that presented users with information that was “relevant” to them. (Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 21-46).

[38](#) Amanda MacMillan, “Why Instagram Is the Worst Social Media for Mental Health,” *Time*, May 25, 2017, <http://time.com/4793331/instagram-social-media-mental-health/>

[39](#) The release of dopamine associated with reward is seen by researchers as the essential reason why social media are found to be addictive to large numbers of users. For example, “[...] Facebook’s architects exploited a ‘vulnerability in human psychology’, explained [Sean] Parker, who resigned from [Facebook] in 2005. Whenever someone likes or comments on a post or photograph, he said, ‘we... give you a little dopamine hit’. Facebook is an empire of empires, then, built upon a molecule.” (Simon Parkin, “Has dopamine got us hooked on tech?” *The Guardian*, March 4, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/04/has-dopamine-got-us-hooked-on-tech-facebook-apps-addiction>).

[40](#) This line of thought was previously developed in the context of our lecture and essay “Neo-Medievalism Explained,” written in the context of Fall Semester Miami’s 2016 symposium and publication. (Metahaven, *Neo-Medievalism Explained* (Fall Semester, 2016), <https://www.librarystack.org/neo%E2%80%90medievalism-explained/>).

[41](#) Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.

[42](#) These three concepts — filtering, stratification, and segmentation — have been borrowed from the research paper “Capture and share the city: Mapping Instagram’s uneven geography in Amsterdam,” by John D. Boy and Justus Uitermark, University of Amsterdam, presented at the RC21 International Conference on “The Ideal City: between myth and reality. Representations, policies, contradictions and challenges for tomorrow’s urban life,” in Urbino (Italy), 27-29 August 2015. See <https://www.rc21.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/B1-boy-uitermark-instagram-paper.pdf>

[43](#) In the US by 2015, some 43% of smartphone owners aged 18 to 29 described their app usage as “continuous.” (Lee Rainie and Kathryn Zickuhr, “Americans’ Views on Mobile Etiquette,” *Pew Research Center*, August 26, 2015,

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/26/chapter-1-always-on-connectivity/>).

[44](#) Elizabeth Stinson writes that “[a]ll social media is designed to keep us coming back, but that’s especially true of mobile apps. In recent years, there’s been pushback against the sticky interface design on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Features like autoplay, endless scroll, reverse chronological timelines, and push notifications were once heralded as frictionless, user-friendly design. Now they’re described as manipulative.” (Elizabeth Stinson, “Stop the Endless Scroll: Delete Social Media From Your Phone,” *Wired*, January 1, 2017, <https://www.wired.com/story/rants-and-raves-desktop-social-media/>)

[45](#) Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 21-46.

[46](#) Tarkovsky, *Collected Screenplays*, 394.